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JOHN LEXLEY'S TROUBLES.

VOL. III.

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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

JOHN LEXLEY'S TROUBLES.

BY

CHARLES W. BARDSLEY, M.A.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY.
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"We will add this in general, touching the affection of envy, that of all other affections it is the most importune and continual; for of other affections there is occasion given but now and then; and therefore it was well said, 'Invidia festos dies non agit:' for it is ever working upon some or other."—BACON, *Of Envy*.

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JOHN LEXLEY'S TROUBLES.

CHAPTER I.

"O let him take heed how he strikes, that hath a dead hand."
FULLER.

THE evening arrived, and the meeting at the chapel was duly held. At eight o'clock, the hour at which the proceedings had been announced to commence, there was not a single absentee. Every man—women were not invited—who had the slightest claim to be there was in his place. I use the term in a general sense, for though every one was eager to be present, every one was not equally eager to be prominent. There were men whom Zion had been wont to see in the fore-front, who sate in the rear to-night. There were men who had claimed chief seats in the synagogue, and whose claim had been allowed, who seemed on this occasion, at least, to be well content and far indeed from ashamed to occupy the lowest

seats. Indeed, while the room was thronged, there was a great backwardness at the outset on the part of any one to assume the lead. On the part of everybody but one.

Ebenezer Emlott took the reins into his hand, and all seemed content. They were not fond of the manufacturer. Scragg, and Bentham, and Skillicorne, as men whose lustre had latterly so paled under the brilliant glare of Emlott's prosperous sun, had a particular dislike to the man. He had committed the sin of having been successful above his fellows. This is one of those transgressions for which a man is never pardoned by his contemporaries. His habitual weaknesses, his exceptional wrongdoings, even these are less referred to as sinful in themselves than in the relation in which they stand to his prosperity. They are simply the adjuncts of such wicked success—nothing more. Had he not been fortunate, they would have been winked at; as the weaknesses of a prosperous man they were something too awful to contemplate. But Scragg, and Bentham, and Skillicorne, especially the latter, seemed to have let all this escape them to-night. If Ebenezer chose to usurp the precedence, so much the better. He was Mr. Lexley's brother-in-law, and the onus and obloquy, if obloquy should happen to follow the onus, would be his. Even at this moment they did not forget that Mr. Emlott had called the meeting.

There were others in the rear, less in social status, who were filled with a curious admixture of pride and cowardice. Mr. Lexley's had been a great name in Lackington, and it was a grand thing to be sitting in judgment upon him. At present they shrank from prominence. They preferred to be spectators to actors. In years to come they would be boasting of the important part they had played in the matter. These men—many of them—Mr. Lexley had been kind to, at various times.

There were others to whom this was a great moral catastrophe, who thought of their sons and their daughters, and of the hindrance this sad disclosure would be to the cause of true religion, and sobriety, and virtue, and were saddened thereby. Of these some came, some stayed away. Some were hard and harsh and stern. Mr. Lexley had no severer critics than they. Some, but fewer in number, were imbued with a heavenly charity—that charity that unites faith in a brother's contrition, and hope in his amendment; and therefore, in its display of tender and loving sympathy, is the superior grace as engrossing all the best elements of the three. Have we not the apostle's word for it?

"I suppose Mr. Juggins will take the chair, Mr. Emlott?" This was said during the preliminary pause, by Mr. Scragg, and was accepted by everybody

as an intentional reminder that Mr. Lexley's brother by marriage must take the whole responsibility of all issues and results upon his own shoulder.

"If the meeting think it necessary," said Ebenezer. "I shall say my say just the same, so it don't matter."

"We'd better adhere to what's conventional in our course o' procedure, gentlemen," put in Barnaby, rising from the bottom end. This, being euphuistic, was well received by the circle more nearly adjacent to himself. Thus encouraged, he added, "I do beg to propose as Mester Juggins, as is meet and right, should tak' the cheear." ("Hear, hear.")

"I beg to second that 'ere motion," said Bentham.

No one thinking it necessary to put it to the meeting, Mr. Juggins sat down, and then immediately got up.

"Brethren——"

"Come, come, no sermons," interrupted Ebenezer.

"Brethren, I address you as such, because I would wish at the outset that we should remember that we meet strictly in that character. ("Hear, hear," from the bottom end.) I might have begun with the conventional greeting of 'Gentlemen'——"

"And so you ought," cried Emlott.

"If we remember that we are brethren, I shall not fear that we shall forget that we are gentlemen.

(Cheers.) The injunction of the apostle is, 'Love as brethren.' And what is to be the outward testimony of this love? It is this: 'Be pitiful, be courteous.' I trust in our converse this evening—whether it be to rebuke, or reprove, or exhort, or even to pass judgment on a fallen brother, we shall not, in the height of controversy, or the heat of passion, lose sight of these blessed accompaniments of Christian gentility and brotherhood. ("Hear, hear.")

"This is the saddest moment of my life, and I had never thought in my old age to encounter it. But if I shrink from it, I do not shirk it. I am here, and here I shall abide till your decision be made. A meeting of this kind must have a chairman, and that chairman ought to be the pastor. ("Hear, hear.") The responsibility of such a convention, too, must rest, not on me, not on Mr. Emlott, not on the deacons, not on the congregation. It must rest upon all—upon Zion itself." There was no "Hear, hear" to this. A good many began to feel frightened. "One or two of you have interested yourselves much in the matter. You have called my attention, and the attention of others, to a circumstance affecting the character of a much-respected member of this chapel—("Hear, hear,")—one who in past days has rendered much service to the cause of truth in this town, one who in particular has been a pillar and

prop to Zion. (Cheers). You who have done this, have done rightly. You had a right to ask for, I will even say demand, a meeting. Zion has acceded to that request, and there all individual responsibility ends. From this moment we are collectively answerable for a faithful discharge of our obligations. Let no man think to throw the burden on another's shoulder. Let no man, if he shall afterwards regret the issues of to-night, say, 'What I did was at So-and-so's instigation.' To do that which is right, and to do it in charity, that is what each of us is bound to, both as respects God and his own conscience." He paused, and then added, "I call upon Mr. Emlott, as one who sought leave to convoke this assembly, to explain his so doing. I shall ask him to be as brief and concise as possible. Let him nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice."

Ebenezer Emlott began under bad auspices. He was already in a towering passion.

"Gentlemen. I say gentlemen." He paused. One "Hear, hear!" was the result. A second followed more faintly, as if it had struggled into life on the express understanding that it should be under the protection of the first. "There is a gross scandal abroad. The story of that scandal is either a vile aspersion, or a vile fact. I don't intend to ha' my mouth gagged by a parson's platitudes, or a minister's

maunderings 'bout unity and brotherly love, and sich-like. I intend to ha' my say, and to say it i' my own way. That story of long and cherished crime is a fact! Ralph Lexley confessed it to me to be true. (Sensation.) And the meeting held to-night is held with but one object, to punish the offender. The character o' Zion hangs in the balance. ("Hear, hear.") We've stood many a shock o' the enemy in past days, but they comed from without. This is a crisis as is mich more perilous. The foe is within, and he comes not with sword in hand—for then we should overmatch him—but with vice in his heart. I shall briefly detail his villany. Mr. Ralph Lexley comed of a good and courageous father; one as freely and boldly joined himself with Zion rather than compromise the truth. (Cheers.) He wur taken from us when we needed him most; and we looked—I say 'we'—for though that generation is fast dying away, and few of us here can recall more than the facts, I trust as Zion, in its corporative capacity, is as yet but in the fulness and vigour of its youth. (Loud cheers.) He wur taken from us, I say, and his son reigned in his stead. He started well. ("Hear, hear.") Our hearts were glad within us; and we hoped his little finger would be thicker, i' Zion's interests, than his father's loins. ("Hear, hear," from Barnaby.) That young man, gentlemen"—Ebenezer became

impressive—"that young man went to London—("Ah, dear!" from several sides)—to London; and on the principle that when you is at Rome you must do as Rome does, he joined himself with Beelzebub. His master delivered him up to one of the daughters of the Philistines. Such is the secrecy of him as had the power over him, that that vile wickedness wur never known for twenty-five years. And he brought back with him into Lackington, into the sacred precincts o' Zion—("Hear, hear,")—the fruit of his evil-doing. He introduced this bastard as born i' wedlock, and he was received as heir o' the Lexleys into the best society as our noble and respectable town can offer. He did not bring the child's mother. That much he dared not do. He says she died. That may be true, or it may be false. In any case he was married at last. He married my sister. She bore him a child; and it is as much in the behalf of Geoffrey Lexley—not to mention Ben, my nephew, —as of this chapel, that I stand forth to-night to proclaim the evil, to denounce the deceiver, and to demand satisfaction for such a prolonged career of misdoing. If you listen to the religious philanderings o' men as is i' their dotage you'll mayhap look lightly o' this thing. If you listen to what's right and proper you'll punish the offender with the fullest rigour as you can. What that punishment shall be I

shall make the subject of a special motion hereafter. I now beg to invite any other gentleman present to offer his opinion." (Cries of "Chair, chair!")

"I beg to remind the speaker that it is the office of the chairman to invite discussion." Mr. Juggins spoke with calm dignity.

"Chairman be—be hanged!" ("Order, order!")

"I shall be glad to listen to any other brother," said the chairman, looking round at the sea of heads before him.

"Mr. Chairman," said Scragg, standing up. "We cannot deny that a serious and griev-ious scandal has fallen upon us. ("Hear, hear.") If we pass over it in silence we stand committed in the same fault. We confirm Mr. Lexley's secrecy as a wise and prudent course. ("Hear, hear.") We must take notice of it. I propose that this meeting, representing the chapel, considers that it cannot continue its association with Mr. Lexley till restitution be made. Let there be a confession of hearty repentance, and let Zion be satisfied that that repentance is sincere, and then it will take into consideration his re-admission to membership. Till that be done I propose that his membership be suspended."

"And what of Johnnie, and the rights of his brother?" cried Ebenezer, contemptuously.

"Had Mr. Lexley actually compromised the right

of his younger child," said Skillicorne, jumping up, "cognizance would be taken in another court than this. As regards his intentions in the future there can only be supposition. I do not believe for one moment that Mr. Lexley was scheming that Mr. Geoffrey might be ousted from his legal position in the event of his own death." ("Hear, hear.")

"Has he made a will?" asked Bentham.

"I may say, I believe, without any breach of legal confidence, that he has not. That fact alone is significant in his favour."

Ebenezer sprang up. "The motion I beg to propose is——"

"The speaker is out of order. There is already a motion before the meeting. ("Hear, hear.") I believe Mr. Scragg's suggestion was intended to be a formal proposition."

"Certainly," from Scragg, jumping up to say it, and sitting down as suddenly.

"Has any one seconded it?"

"I second that 'ere motion," said Barnaby.

"You are permitted to move an amentment, Mr. Emlott."

Ebenezer still contrived to swallow his wrath. His triumph would come at the end. His threatened resignation would come like a bombshell.

"I beg to move, as an amendment—'That this

extraordinary meeting—consisting of official and worshipping members of Zion Chapel—do hereby decide, that in view of the enormity of the charge made upon, and admitted to be true by, Ralph Lexley, he shall be publicly deprived of his membership until he has removed John Lexley from his house and protection. That the continued presence there of his base-begotten child be looked upon as the pledge of his unrepentance, and that no further relations with him come under consideration until that act of decency and morality be carried out.'"

"Does any brother second that amendment?" There was a pause, and then a weak voice in the middle of the room undertook the office. It was a Mr. Wilkins, a new member.

"Before putting the amendment," said the chairman, "I wish to say a few words. It seems to some brethren present, that the enormity of Mr. Lexley's crime has been increased by the fact that he has kept his unfortunate child under his protection and care. I cannot blame him for that. To my mind it is the redeeming feature of an act which otherwise is all black and dark with sin. Can it be an aggravation of his evil-doing, that he should have refrained from throwing, as thousands do, the innocent proof of his transgression upon the streets to starve, and to die—nay, worse than that, to grow up in the atmosphere

and pollution of all that is corrupt and depraved, and to pass away into the darker realms beyond without so much as a hand stretched out to save it? To ward off this, is that to heighten guilt and magnify wrong? Brethren, I read this act differently. I say nothing of the wisdom of the act. I read in the presence of his boy at the Grange a desire from the day of his birth to make restitution for the evil. I read in it a yearning to set wrong right. I see deep contrition in it, and hearty sorrow for sin. I am more assured of this when I review the outward life and conversation of Ralph Lexley from that day to this. Who for five and twenty years can say aught against Ralph Lexley? Has he not been an ensample which his fellows might well follow? Has he not walked humbly and diffidently as became one who had fallen so grievously? Be not hasty in your conviction. Now, at any rate, no harm can befall his legitimate offspring. I do not believe he ever intended it. Their position is secure. Why, then, should the father be robbed of his child? Why should he be stripped of him who is but a daily reminder of his fault, and therefore a constant, though unconscious, watchman over his conscience, and abettor of his continued repentance? Brethren, I am not ashamed to confess it, I love to think of the magnanimous conduct of the father towards the child. ("Hear, hear.") I do not advo-

cate his remaining at the Grange now that the secret is out. That is a matter which I hold you and I have nothing to do. ("Hear, hear.") Mr. Emlott's amendment, in my opinion, if carried, would call upon us to decide that which the mother of Geoffrey Lexley and her husband alone can make the subject of deliberation. It is a delicate, a private, and a domestic concern. (Cheers.) It would be a prurient and illicit action on our part to intermeddle in the matter. My own view is this. Ralph Lexley committed a dreadful and heinous crime twenty-five years ago. He has proved by his life, his conversation, and even his actions in respect of his baseborn offspring, that his contrition is as old as his transgression. He has only repented once, but that is ever since. That he must even now be admonished I admit—nay, I deem it right that that admonition should be of a public character. If it be your will, I will myself in person, as your pastor and his, bear your rebuke with my own, your exhortation with my own, and, I trust your forgiveness with my own. (Cheers.) The future relations of Mr. and Mrs. Lexley with the three children who have been brought up under their roof, with that we have nothing to do. (Cheers.) To one and all I would say, 'Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit

of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.'" (Loud cheers.)

"Has any other brother any remark to make before the amendment is put?"

No one got up. Ebenezer was reserving himself. But his countenance was black with rage.

"The amendment is as follows:—'That in view of the enormity of the charge alleged against, and admitted by, Ralph Lexley, the said Ralph Lexley be publicly deprived of his membership, and that all connection between him and Zion Chapel be terminated until he have removed John Lexley, his illegitimate child, from his house and protection. Moved by Mr. Ebenezer Emlott, and seconded by Mr. Peter Wilkins.' Those who are in favour of the amendment will please to hold up their hands. Those who are opposed thereto will now do the same. The amendment is lost. Do you demand a poll, Mr. Emlott?"

Mr. Emlott had only carried five with him. A forest of hands had been upraised against his proposition. He thought for a moment, and then answered in the negative. He got up, however, at the same moment.

"May I say a word, Mr. Chairman, before the original motion is put to the meeting?" There was a significant humility in his tone, which portended

that a crisis had come. It was as the still atmosphere that ushers in the summer storm.

"Certainly," said Mr. Juggins, for the first time a little outwardly frightened.

"My observations, or rather observation, will be but a brief one. If the motion be carried I shall cut my connection wi' th' chapel. Either Ralph Lexley is turned out by force, or I turn out o' my own accord."

A cry of dismay followed this announcement. The manufacturer's triumph had begun. Whatever his motive, he had been a very liberal supporter of the chapel.

"Am I to understand that Mr. Emlott makes Mr. Lexley's expulsion the condition of his own continued relationship with our body?" asked Barnaby.

"You are, sir," said Ebenezer, grimly.

At this moment there was a confused noise at the bottom end of the room. Then a whisper went from lip to lip, "It's Mister Geoffrey himself." Yes, that was assuredly Geoffrey Lexley who was travelling swiftly up the middle of the room. He stopped at the platform, and turning round, faced his uncle. His face was pale as death. Years seemed to have been added to his brow in that one hour.

"May I say a word, Mr. Juggins?"

"If it be to the motion, Mr. Geoffrey," said the chairman, pityingly.

"It is strictly to the motion." He turned to his uncle again. "You have just threatened that if this motion of conditional pardon be carried you will cease your connection with the chapel. Am I correct?"

"Quite," said Ebenezer, with a slight chuckle.

Geoffrey turned to the audience, and uttered his words slowly and distinctly.

"I beg to inform this meeting that at least a week ago Mr. Emlott promised Mrs. Bland to leave the Baptists, become an Episcopalian, and attend the parish church if she would become his wife. She assented on those terms. He further added that he preferred Mr. Bradford's ministry to Mr. Haddock's, because the service was more ornate."

There was a momentary pause, and then a howl of indignation arose. The manufacturer flew at Geoffrey's throat, and for an instant overwhelmed his nephew—powerful and young as he was. But strong men were there, and the arm that would have fallen with a crushing force was stayed.

"Is this statement true, Mr. Emlott?" asked the chairman. It was scarcely heard amid the Babel of voices.

"I decline to answer," replied the deacon, trying to rid himself of his adversaries.

"Brethren, let us be fair. In your name I again ask Mr. Emlott—Is the charge true or false?"

Ebenezer said nothing.

Mr. Skillicorne jumped up. "Gentlemen, I have a motion to propose."

"It's out o' order," shouted the manufacturer. "There's a motion afore the meeting."

"That's true, Mr. Skillicorne," put in Mr. Juggins.

"I beg, then, to propose a fresh amendment before the motion is put. I propose that it is the will of this meeting that Ebenezer Emlott be expelled from his membership." (Loud and protracted cheering.)

"I am afraid that is a distinct motion, and not an amendment," said Mr. Juggins.

There was a pause. Mr. Skillicorne and a few others put their heads together.

Again Mr. Skillicorne got up. "The amendment I have to place before this meeting is this—'That this assembly of official and general members of Zion Chapel empower Mr. Juggins to act according to his discretion, and in their behalf, with respect to the charge laid against Ralph Lexley—(Cheers)—and that Ebenezer Emlott be at once expelled from all connection with the body of Baptists worshipping at this chapel.'" Prolonged applause followed this statement.

"It's out o' order," cried the manufacturer.

"It's in order"—"That'll do"—"Bravo"—"Turn him out," resounded from all sides.

"I say it's out o' order," shouted Ebenezer.

"I shall put it, sir," said Mr. Juggins. "It may be that our proceedings are not as punctilious as they might have been, but I think even Mr. Emlott will consider the circumstances that have made them so to be exceptional." (Cheers.)

The amendment was put and carried without a dissentient. Every hand went up. It was literally a forest of *palms*.

"It's a empty farce. I'm not a member. I resigned a week ago, as my nephew says," cried Ebenezer, trying to rally himself.

"What have you come here for, then?" shouted several. Then the Babel was renewed. "Turn him out"—"He's no member"—"The sneak"—"Papist"—"Old Short-o'-weight"—"Go back to your carrots"—"He's as rotten as his own cabbages." The manufacturer began to be hustled. He turned pale, and seized his hat.

"I'll not stay to be insulted by a pack o' low ruffians," he cried. He essayed to get out by the door behind the platform, but this was locked. There was no help for it. He must face the foe. He passed down the middle of the room, hustled, jostled on every side; the butt, too, of a hundred expletives of scorn and reproach.

But his great trouble was to follow. Some of the

younger men had stolen out, and were prepared for him. Where do all the decayed cabbages, fœtid turnips, disintegrated stumps of vegetables, come from at junctures like this? How is it that at a moment's notice there are corrupt eggs to be had, and in abundance? Who keeps them, and why are they kept? Do hens lay them ready rotten, and to order? What a strange coincidence, too, that putrid carrion, in the shape of cats on the wrong side of life by a couple of months, and contemporaneously defunct dogs, are lying to hand, when the one use to which they can be put above ground is required.

When Ebenezer Emlott reached home he looked in as pitiable a plight as could well befall a man who, in all simplicity of confidence, had left his home in check trousers, a black frock-coat, and white embroidered waistcoat.

"You may have that waistcoat, Tomkins," said his master, throwing it outside his bed-room door.

"Thank you, sir." Tomkins took it ruefully between two fingers. What he did with it is not known. He was never seen in it, as he had been seen in Sir Reginald Fitz-George Sackville St. Omer's, according to his own statement.

CHAPTER II.

"I was the true descendant of those old W——s : and not the present family of that name, who had fled the old waste places.

"Mine, too,—whose else? thy costly fruit-garden, with its sunbaked southern wall : the ampler pleasure-garden, rising backward from the house in triple terraces."—*Essays of Elia.*

Of all that followed after the exposure of his uncle's duplicity Geoffrey Lexley was totally unaware. He stole out from the meeting as quickly as he had entered it. No one seemed to have noted his departure.

All the healthy hue had disappeared from his face. Pale and trembling, he bent his steps, he scarcely knew whither. The stars still shone out pure and clear, but it seemed as if he must not meet their gaze. The unmixed purity of such a sheen as theirs was a reproach. His horizon was stained, and dark, and foul; his sky lowering with guilt. The expanse of his future life, he could not penetrate it, it was so discoloured with impurity. He dared not meet a

star's steadfast look, no more than he dared just now confront a fellow-creature's eye.

Then his spirit within him was fired with indignation of his father; then again his soul was sad for him. He wished he might never see him again; he longed to throw his arm about him, and say that it was a sin of long remission, and that the penalty was past. Would he spurn him when they met? would he cling to him in filial fear? Could he restrain his wrath, or would the reverence of the sanctity of fatherhood overcome every obstacle and leave him at his feet?

He thought of his mother, and his heart wept for her. She who, in her severe anxiety to do the right, had become a slave to her own conscience, and made her own life miserable—she, so sensitive of wrong; so harsh, as he had thought, upon all evil-doing; so sternly upright; whose purity shone till its glare was well-nigh painful to beholders;—she—how could she bear this coming crushing blow? His trouble was this, that it would not kill her. Well he knew that. Her sense of duty to life and the living would prevent her being finally overwhelmed. But this living on, in the face of such a calamity—this determinate living on with the set purpose that she might confront such a doleful disaster, would not this be tenfold worse than death?

Then his thoughts sped on to Johnnie. I am wrong; this was impossible. Johnnie had never been absent from his thoughts. What would Johnnie do in this great distress? Such a slender reed—how could the blast else than snap it? To think that he who had sought his protection throughout life must now be actually subsistent upon him. The elder had leant upon the younger, and that mattered little while the fact remained that he was the elder. Now the fact had suddenly sunk into falsity, and he was himself alike the elder and the sustainer. All his past life had been an insult. He had been reminding his brother of his coming disgrace. He had been mocking at his future degradation. Oh, why had he not been born weak and fragile? Why not he diffident of strength and unconfident of self, that he might have rested upon his stronger brother, and not now feel as if he had for years been mimicking that which was really to be?

The Grange was his—not Johnnie's. The thought stung him into a madness. Never! Never should it be his. He would die first.

It was getting late. They would be looking for him at home. Out of the window his brother would be peering for him. Out of the door his mother would be standing, and looking athwart the gravelly pathway. And the window, and the door, and

the very gravel were his; all prospectively his; his at this very moment, so far as his brother's right was concerned. How he hated the house—the home of his childhood—the house he loved so well—that window with the curtain brushed aside, and Johnnie looking through it! He had sat at that window as a little boy, and mended his kite there, and read his fairy tales there, and shouted to Johnnie outside there. That window was his. A sense of proprietorship was upon him. Legal entail, like a wild, famished animal, had fastened upon him from behind, and would not be shaken off. The fangs were in his flesh; its hot breath was inflaming his blood. How he loathed that window that was his! And all the house was his. Never!

Johnnie could have the mill. It must have been the Tempter that whispered that. Avaunt, Serpent! Were he to abide near Johnnie, he would from day to day but perpetuate the memory of his lost heritable standing. This would be the cruelest wrong of all. To live at the Grange, and be happy, his brother being by, would be to be holding mirth and revelry over the grave of Johnnie's perished right.

If he did not take the Grange, Ben would. "Vile Tempter, there thou art again! Thou shalt assuredly fail. That is thy last dart; but better it had been drawn only at a venture, for any effect that it can take

Drawn with such set and sly cunning, I am ware of thee."

He did not go straight home. He returned to Mr. Juggins's; and from the lips of the kindly minister, the details, so far as Mr. Juggins was aware of them, were recited to him. Then he turned homewards. His heart yearned for his brother. He must see him, and see him quickly. There was only one light in the lower part of the Grange. It shone from the dining-room, and through the chinks of the shutters.

His mother met him, looking anxious. "We have been looking for you for an hour. It is half-past ten."

"I have been out walking."

"Alone?"

"Quite alone. There were stars, and trees, and thoughts, of course, but I didn't seem to care for them." I don't think he knew what he was saying. "Where's Johnnie?"

"Gone to bed. I made him go."

He took up a candle and lit it.

"You will have some supper, Gip?" Gip had been a great fellow for supper. Some of his greatest feats had been achieved at the supper-table.

"Not to-night, thank you, mother."

There was a burden upon Mrs. Lexley's heart, too. The same burden as Geoffrey's, only she did

not know its contents; else she would have noticed Geoffrey's strange vein. She could not see the deadly paleness of his face. Candle-light casts a customary pallor on the countenance. How often we think we are ill by candle-light, looking into the mirror before undressing for sleep.

"Good-night, mother. God bless you!"

It was rather a strange thing for a lad to say. But the shadow was upon his mother. It did not seem fanciful nor abrupt to her.

"And God bless you, Gip!" It was a habit of hers when about to kiss one of her children, to take the face into her two hands. She laid a flat side on either cheek, and pressed the mouth comfortably and in a pudgy fashion towards her own. It was homely rather than elegant. She always kissed the lips; never the cheek, nor forehead, nor chin, nor side of the nose, as some people do. There are men and women who have not the faintest conception how to go about giving a kiss—this, too, in spite of lengthened practice. They will die in their ignorance, for kissing is not a matter of method. *Osculum nascitur, non fit.* It is an instinct, not a science. A great and careful writer has said that instinct is "a propensity prior to experience, and independent of instruction." Such is the instinctive kiss. There was a good hearty smack, too, in Mrs. Lexley's maternal kiss that left a

pleasant echo in the heart, one that lingered there in multitudinous happy vibrations when other sounds that disturbed it were still.

Geoffrey thought he should remember that kiss to the end of his life.

"Go softly, Gip. I do not think your father is well. He has been very listless all day, and to-night I noticed a strange look in his eye—a kind of film."

"Did he say he was ill?"

"I asked him twice, but he did not seem to care to reply. He looked as if he were in a stupor, half asleep, half awake."

Johnnie was fast asleep when Geoffrey reached his room. A smile played about his mouth. He looked at him long and earnestly, and then stole quietly round the bed to a chest of drawers. His lips quivered, but his eye was set. He brought out from the top drawer a coat, then a waistcoat. From another he took a shirt, and a collar or two, a night-gown, and a pair of stockings. All these he laid upon his own bed, walking stealthily the while. Very quiet he had to be in getting to his little travelling-bag that lay under Johnnie's bed. But he got it safely to his own side of the room at last, and began to fill it with the different articles of dress he had taken out of the drawers. Then he paused, and laid his head in his hands, in deep momentary thought.

The thought changed his purpose. He put everything back again into its place, only he set the bag under his own bed.

He went to a writing-desk on the small cabinet that stood near the door, opened it, took out something that looked like money, and a note or two, put all in his pocket, and turned the handle of the door to go out. He had to wait, however, for his mother was climbing the staircase. She had taken a last look round to see that all was safe, as was her wont. She was now going to bed.

There was a turn of the lock in the distance, and now he knew that all was safe. All was safe for his exit, but that little pause had tried him. His determination had been undermined. He would have a look at Johnnie again.

He took his boots off, and left them outside. He came back to his brother's bed. Johnnie was still asleep—the smile more illuminative than before. His lips moved, too. Geoffrey bent his ear.

"Yes, I know. You're the little child-angel, arn't you? I shall never be frightened again."

Geoffrey knelt down, and he prayed that if child-angels are sent indeed of God on errands of childlike trust, this messenger might beget a like faith in Johnnie's heart.

"I shall never be afraid again." It was the first

solacing cry that had stolen into his heart. It was said in a dream—and what so fanciful, so unreal as a dream? Nevertheless he believed it, and he withdrew comforted.

The child-angel—Johnnie had never forgotten her. Strange that he himself had only seen that figure once. At least he did not remember to have seen it more than once. He had laughed gently at his brother's whimsical mood. He had had the curiosity to see that marble relief, and its sweet-faced occupant only once. What a dull, unimaginative life had been his!

He crept downstairs, holding his shoes in his hand. He turned the lock of the front door, and then put them on; but his mind lay with the child-angel. For the first time he had a conscience of the direction he was to take. He made straight for the church, and the deep window at the side of the chancel.

How strange to be walking along a familiar path, at an unfamiliar time; to be alone where every yard has its tale of faces and companionship! The trees were very still, for the night-wind had scarce power to ruffle a leaf. He had passed lightly down the left side of the haw-haw in the front; he had crossed a short meadow, and had reached the main path when, amid this stillness, he was startled by a sharp and sustained cry in the rear. It was faint, but distinct.

He stood and listened, his heart in his mouth. No other sound followed. What could it have been? From what direction had it come? He couldn't be sure. Had he heard any cry at all? He began to laugh at his terror. This great trouble had all unnerved him. He turned on his way, and had even strength to untrammel himself for a moment from the meshes of all his sorrow, and wonder how it was that a disturbed mind could so easily become the victim of fancy. Even the ear could be deceived.

After that he thought no more about it. It was a pretty lane that led to the church. He knew it well. Evening after evening in the summer he had sped swiftly down this pathway to get half an hour's bowling from the professional. Often Johnnie had accompanied him, and then left him to enter the churchyard. How they would miss him in that return match against Glapton! Without him there would be no change-bowler.

Even at that moment he took it ill that Lackington's great enemy should be so much the better in the coming struggle by his absence.

He clambered over the wall into the churchyard. How full it was of graves! On every side were headstones, antique or broken, but all fantastic-seeming in the late-risen moon. There were many slabs, too. Long grasses and weeds hung over some, and some

were half-buried in earth, or in a mould, of which themselves were part, so decayed they were. But though he made no haste, he did not linger here. It was the child-angel he had come to see—not these—not the dead. He made his way amid the sombre pathways that ran in and out among the tombs, and under the still more sombre avenues of yew, till he reached the porch. Creeping along this wall to the right, he knew that he must soon come to the deep window on the north side of the chancel.

It was a curious fancy he had to see the child-angel reposing, palm in hand, so nearly to the vizarded knight, on his hard, cold couch of marble. Amid the outside tombs he had felt that he was beside them that were not. It was different with her. She was a living thing to him just now. Yes, living, and connected by living bonds to Johnnie; so living as to have a responsible care upon her, the protection of his brother. Had she not given some kind of pledge to that effect, and had he not come to exact it of her? For the life of him he could recall no other motive for his *détour* from the beaten road than this.

The shallow window reached, he lifted a corbel from where it had fallen, half-sunken in the soil. What a grim face stared at him, with its hollow eyes! What a monster, grinning mouth it had! Why on earth had men chiselled such things as these, to

decorate the sanctuary of beauty and holiness? Johnnie could have told him in a trice. How clever Johnnie's tastes and thoughtful, studious nature had made him! The dunce!—why, he was the clever one of the family; clever in all that rose above the mechanical gift of doing one's work in the world, and making money. He wondered he had not thought of this before. A dim impression of the fact had been there, but it had never stood out clearly and boldly as a distinct truth ere now.

Standing on tiptoe upon the broken nose—unless it had originally been flat and broad—of the ugly face upturned to him, he peered within. He could see the family pew, with its rotten, or rotting escutcheon pendent just above. On the other side, but more distinct—for a moonbeam had struggled into the interior—he could see the Grewby pew, with the hatchment over it, which, since his brother's sudden death, the present proprietor of the Park would not permit to be taken down. How gloomy and funereal it looked! And, ah, there was the sculptured knight—and, could he see the little relief below? No; he thought not.

What was that? His blood curdled within him. A bright light shone suddenly upon the very object of his search. He saw the little child, with her gentle, heavenly smile, her wings, her outstretched hands,

the Roman letters beneath. He could almost make out the words. That was C., and that was G. Those figures, too, were a one, a four, a cipher, and a three. What was that light? How came it there? He stood spell-bound, rather with an undefined awe than real terror. He had never in his life been afraid of ghosts, or such other bugbears as frighten grown-up people as well as children. Even now he began at once to look for a cause, the last thing in the world that folk do when they think they see a ghost. The pews were old-fashioned and high on the hither side of the monument, and the light came directly from the aisle, at its foot. A candle set on the ground would shed just such a light as this. It flickered, too. It must be a candle. And now a man's—no, a woman's head for a moment appeared above the ledge of the pews. There it was again. It was a head he did not recognize; but he could not see the face, so there was no telling. He watched with intense curiosity. He almost forgot his trouble in his spirit of inquisitiveness.

The woman—yes, it must be a woman—now stood up, and immediately a man stood up with her. It was this man who held the candle. It was Isaac Curling. The other, though the light shone upon her face, he did not know. It was an oldish face, foreign in outline and complexion, somewhat crinkled too,

and with that look of deep cunning about the eyes, which seldom becomes resident till years and experience have left it so. She might be fifty-five. They both walked towards the vestry door, and then disappeared. Geoffrey wondered much what could have brought Isaac there at that hour, and in that company; but it was strange how his curiosity had subsided after he had recognized the genealogist. He was just the man to be discovered in such a midnight adventure as this—an eccentric, but harmless fellow, with that tendency to secrecy, for which his nature and the character of his pursuits had made him remarkable. He had been clerk, too, at the church, and knew every stick and stone, consecrated though they were, of the place. There was nothing strange, after all, in the occurrence saving his own coming, and catching them there. Would he ever see Isaac in after years, and would the old antiquary recollect the occasion? He stole away, careful not to be seen of the two other visitants; and getting upon the main road, struck out boldly upon his journey.

This was the London road—the old stage road. Did he know it? One thing was certain; he was leaving the Grange, and he might never see it again. He would never live there, and see Johnnie degraded. He would never rise himself by his brother's fall. Never!

There was but one more incident to rouse his curiosity. He was passing Dr. Garfitt's door, himself on the other side, when he saw that gentleman come out in a precipitate fashion. Some one within was telling him to be very careful; and if he could not return that night, he must send word. There was a kiss given, which he knew to be Mrs. Garfitt's. He could have told it anywhere.

"It's a bad case, I fear," said the doctor.

"I hope you won't be too late," replied his spouse.

Geoffrey wondered who it was that was ill; and as the doctor hurried off in the other direction, he came forth from his hiding-place, and sped along at five miles the hour—his face to London.

CHAPTER III.

"Bervaldus will have drunkards, afternoon men, and such as more than ordinarily delight in drink, to be mad. The first pot quencheth thirst, so Panyasis the poet determines in Athenæus, *secunda gratiis, horis et Dyonisio:* the second makes merry, the third for pleasure, *quarta ad insaniam,* the fourth makes them mad."—DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR.

IT was two days after this when, in the first watches of the morning, Geoffrey trod the streets of the metropolis. He had not walked the whole journey—that I need scarcely say. But he had walked to Derby, and from thence he had taken coach southward.

There was so far only one purpose—separation from home and his brother. This he had accomplished. While the determination was fresh, and his mind in a strange tumult of bewildering emotion, he had found it not a very difficult task to leave the Grange, to forsake Johnnie and his mother, and to start on an uncertain quest. While, too, he was walking throughout that first autumnal night on limestone roads, and amid landscapes only less beautiful

than those hilly tracts of the Derbyshire Peak, into which they ushered him, he had found it a facile task. The nobleness of self-abnegation was upon him; and night, with its mystery, had fostered it, though he knew it not.

But the night passed; and as he trod his way into daylight again, the wild tumult was well-nigh over. The cold dawn began, for the time, to quench the warm and hot emotions of his heart. His brain cooled down. The sense of desolation came. He—whose past world had been so circumscribed; whose actual sphere of doing had never transgressed a given narrow circle—was now, for the first time, outside that margin, to do as best he could, and alone. It seemed as if he had spent his life upon the familiar orb of the yet visible moon, and was now pitched unawares into space to grope darkly among the stars. How blank and interminable the space! How endlessly big the world became now that he was well out of Lackington, and the day was dawning—so big that, turn his face to whatever point of the compass he would, he could travel on and on, and come—whither? What an awful thing was an unknown world! Assuredly he was in sober mood now that dawn was come. The glamour of the renunciation of heirship and home had illumined his path during the watches of the night. So clearly had it shone that he had

travelled onwards, brave and fearless, nor stumbled once into a mistiness of purpose, nor faltered once from an ignorance of the way.

Now, in the colder natural dawn, his intrepidity had died out of him. Oh, how cold the outward sunlight in comparison of the inner illumination! So long as he had been a light unto himself, as he who wears a horn-lantern at his mid-girdle, he had fought bravely against the outer dark. But that light had become ineffectual against the cold and carefully balanced approach of a grey morning sky.

But as the day advanced and the sun shone out of the early mists, the mountains began to stand out clearly and defined. And so did his resolve. He breakfasted at a roadside inn—a hearty breakfast it was. He washed his hands and face at a spring. It was deliciously cold, and pellucid in its clearness. He pressed on vigorously until noon, and through the lingering sultry afternoon, till at length, footsore and drooping, he reached Derby. How utterly spent he was! The flow had turned to ebb again. He was dejected from his lofty mind.

He came to a little hostelry, and sat him down in the bar-parlour. Very clean it was, and floor-sanded, only somewhat reeky of tobacco.

The landlady surveyed him from across the passage. He was travel-stained, and his strong limbs

hung down helplessly. His feet were hot and jaded. She was a comfortable, portly woman herself. Her girth must have been something immense; and a bunch of keys at her girdle, by their jingle, seemed ever to be inviting attention to the fact. Her face—a full-moonly face it was—wore a rubicund and buxom expression. There was a chirrup, too, in the very way in which she brisked about. How her keys jingled!

She looked again at the lad. "There's aching hearts wherever he be coom fro'. Eh, but there's a many sore partings i' this world." Motherly sympathy was at work. She had a son at sea.

"You'll maybe like some tea, sir?" she said cheerily. "You look main tired, you do, for sure."

"Thank you—yes, I should like a cup of tea very much." He scarce lifted his head. He hadn't strength to do it.

"And a bit o' something tasty wi' it? I know what young gentlemen's appetites is. There's a rare bit o' rump-steak i' th' cellar. Mester Jackson, the clothier, wur here at noon, and I clean forgot to ax him if he'd have it. I might ha' knowed as you was coming, for he'd ha' snapped it up i' no time. I wonder he never smelled it. I do, for sure."

Geoffrey's eye sparkled for an instant. It was not the steak so much as the cheery tone of the speaker.

"I believe I smell it myself." He laughed feebly. As for the landlady, it might have been the finest joke in Christendom. Her huge waist shook in an alarmingly convulsive manner, and her keys jingled as if they had gone into fits of laughter entirely on their own account.

"Eh, but that's a good un. I mun tell Mester Jackson that o' Tuesday forenoon. And what'll you 'ave by way o' a relish—eh?"

"I'll leave that to you, ma'am."

"You couldna do better. God forgi'e me for boasting, but I should ne'er ha' bin so pursy and comfortable as this if I'd not bin keen o' relish, I do assure you. You's walked far?"

"Ay. I left Lackington last night."

"Nay, for sure, did you? Then you shall ha' the 'Nelson,' that you shall. There's Mester Naper i' it at present; but he'll turn out, he will—though there's no one as 'ud coax him out o' it beside me. I hope I shall be forgiven for boasting, but it's true. There's na sich soft bed i' England."

Geoffrey did not like to tell her that he preferred a hard one. He was sufficiently grateful not to hurt an old-fashioned prejudice. "Anywhere will do for me. I could sleep on a slop-stone to-night."

"They's all engaged, sir, I'm sorry to say," she

said seriously, and then laughed so loudly that the rafters trembled. With this crowning and unsurpassable jest, the landlady went out. Geoffrey had gathered together what strength and spirits he had left in him, and joined heartily in her mirth.

"Poor lad, poor lad! He's a nice young gentleman, he is; and he's left some to pine arter him, wherever they is. But he can relish a joke, he can. Warn't a bad un, neither."

How he slept that night! Spent Nature exacted her dues, with a calm peremptoriness, of all he had done and thought and felt for nearly forty hours. He had intended to frame his plans as he lay in bed. But his falling into bed and into sleep was all one action.

There was a London coach timed to start at an early hour the next morning. It ran by way of Leicester and St. Alban's, and was connected with another coach that travelled all night from the North. The landlady had promised both to secure him a place, if there was a vacancy, and to waken him at the right hour. Nevertheless, his door had to undergo many a hard rap before the slumberer was roused. But the instant he opened his eyes and saw the strange curtains, he knew everything.

He dressed quickly, and again satisfied the good woman of the house by his prowess at the breakfast-

table. But who could have withstood that rasher and coffee?

"And dunno lose 'art, young gentleman. And whatever you do, go straight to Mester Buggins's, No. 16, Back Bolton Street, out o' Holborn. Tell him as Mrs. Dixey, of the Black Horse, sent you."

"Derby?"

The landlady laughed. "Ah, Derby. Tell him as Mrs. Dixey was very careful to say Derby. Tell him as she was awful particular as you should say it wur no other Mrs. Dixey, nor no other Black Horse; but that both on em's the identical articles as he knows on." How she did laugh! "Good-bye to you, young sir, and keep your 'art up. Eh, but that wur a good un," she said to herself, as, with her hand to shelter her eyes, she watched the coach fade away into the distance. Everything, whether it were a steak, or a jest, or a friend, or a pickled onion, was 'a good un,' in Mrs. Dixey's estimation. Happy soul! If only people would sometimes think that their daily bread, their position in life, their hourly surroundings, was 'a good un.'

There were only three outside passengers. They had travelled all night from the North. Two had just breakfasted and were comforted, the third was still asleep.

"Queer party," said one of the refreshed pair,

turning to Geoffrey. "Started dead drunk—would have fallen overboard three times, but for us. We had to strap him down at last."

"His wife's inside," continued the other. "Cool as a cucumber."

"Wasn't she anxious, then?" asked Geoffrey.

"Not a bit. I shouted to her soon after we started, and after about ten minutes of it, she put her head out. 'What's up, now?' she cries. 'Well, he does happen to be up now, ma'am,' I said; 'but he won't be long. It's your husband—he's bent o' falling off.' 'No such luck,' she answered; and in went her head. She never looked out again, and we had to strap him down. He rebelled at first; but afterwards came round, and promised upon his honour not to put us into the hands of the next policeman he saw, if we would bring him some whiskey, hot, at the next stopping-place. He was very sorry, but the strap prevented him getting his hand into his pocket for the money, but it would be made right, of course. Between gentlemen such things were easily arranged."

"You did not see it in the same light, I suppose?"

"Not exactly."

There was no need of whispering, for the subject of their conversation was still wrapt in a leaden slumber. His snores, too, nearly drowned all other sounds. It was not the ordinary snore that pro-

gresses to a climax, and then you start again, but a kind of climax perpetualized. The climax would persist in going on climax-ing.

"Did his wife get out at Derby?" asked Geoffrey.

"Yes. And didn't she make a breakfast? She's rather a tall, stylish woman. She's gaunt-looking, all the same, and wants more flesh. Did her best to get it this morning, and no mistake. There was no chance for anybody at her end of the table. This gentleman here asked, as we were getting down, if he should awake her husband, remarking that *he was still there*. She got out of the coach, looked up at him, and said she couldn't think of disturbing him, he was sleeping like an infant. 'Such slumbers,' she added, 'should be always slept out, if it were only to prolong such a spectacle o' purity and innocence.' I offered to get her a chair that she might sit and look at him while we were at breakfast, but she declined with mock thanks, and said she had seen him before, and was fearful the moral effect might wear off if she did it too often."

"They're a queer lot. The coachman says they're booked for London."

"Excuse me, shir, Paris-h, if you please." A violent snort, and the sleeper was wide awake.

There was a momentary confusion, followed by an apology, and a laugh.

"Paris, is it, sir?"

"Yes, we're going straight on to Paris-h. At least, I think so."

"I should have thought he was on it already," whispered Geoffrey to one of his new friends, "to judge by his appearance."

The other laughed.

"Fine city, Paris-h. Know it well. Eh, bless me, what's this?"

"Only a waistband, sir."

"How did I get into it? Terry's not been up here, has she?" He trembled.

"I won't name no parties, sir. But you know you can set-up a log o' wood, and you can up-set a log o' wood. The words is the same, but the position isn't."

"Do you mean, sir, to say I'm not master of my actions?"

"Well, no, not exactly; but you was a oscillating violently forrards, and there's a bit o' a precipice afore you. And as th' way-bill says as there's no passengers to be picked up—picked up's the very words, sir—atwixt Stockport an' Derby, we thought as we'd best see as you was kept safe. You wasn't quite so well last night, if you can recollect, was you?"

"Only a shivering fit. I'm occasionally subject that way."

"Never seed sich shivering i' all my life. Do you take nothing for it?"

"I'm trying whiskey just now. Brandy didn't seem—not exactly, that is—to suit my constitution. Whiskey, I think you observed, was the contents of that bottle, sir, wasn't it?" He looked anxiously at the neck of a bottle that protruded from the countryman's left coat-pocket."

"I didn't know as I'd made any observation o' the subject," said the other drily; "but if you mun know, it's brandy—brandy-and-water, that is——"

"Brandy-and-water! How strange! What an extraordinary coincidence! There's about an equal admixture o' water and spirits, isn't there, now?" The traveller spoke with eagerness.

"About a quarter o' th' cellar, to three-quarters o' th' cistern."

"How exceedingly remarkable! My doctor will persist in recommending me to take water with my brandy. 'Brandy by itself doesn't suit your complaint, sir,' he says. 'You must have water with it; say one part of distilled to three parts of filtered.' The same proportion, mark you. Isn't it extraordinary?"

"Most remarkable," assented the countryman, drily. "And you've not followed his advice?"

"Not hitherto, but——"

"Quite right. Don't believe him."

"He's a clever doctor. I must say that for him."

"Ah, p'raps so, p'raps so," said the countryman, removing the cork, and taking a prolonged pull at the bottle that was the topic of conversation, by inserting the neck in his mouth. "That's what I call a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull altogether, that is," he added, playing with the cork, and gasping slightly.

"It depends how you look at the last part of the proposition. 'Altogether' may mean either in a complete manner, or in a conjoint manner. If the first, the passage would be interpreted thus—that you 'took an altogether long and strong pull.' There's no doubt about the correctness of that reading if we appeal to facts," he added, gazing somewhat dismally at the half-empty vessel. "If, on the other hand, 'altogether' means 'conjointly,' then united and confederate action is implied. Thus the reading would be—'you took a long pull, a strong pull, and with the combined assistance of your friends you finished the bottle.' Do you follow me, sir?"

"I quite follow you; but seems to me as it's you as wants to follow me."

"You foreclose the argument with wonderful accuracy, sir," said the strapped passenger, without even the incipiency of a blush.

"I don't deserve no compliments, sir. Th' merit is yourn; you've made it so plain." He said no more, and made no proffer of the bottle; on the contrary, he inserted the cork with extreme care, and put it into its former receptacle. Its neck still stood up, and the boosy passenger gave it an occasional look of the most melancholy and yearnful character.

"We shall be at Derby shortly, I suppose?" he said, in a tone of revived hope.

"Left it half an hour ago. That's one of the church spires yonder."

"What, you've had breakfast?" asked the again depressed traveller.

"Yes. Capital rasher o' bacon wi' eggs, and mushrooms alongside."

"And we've passed Derby?" Dejection sat on every feature. "That's Terry's doing, that is. I'll pay her off, I will. I'll tell; that's what I'll do."

He paused a moment as if to listen, and then cried out in a louder and more husky tone, "I'll tell." He stopped, and again set his head in an attentive pose.

"I'll tell," he shouted.

No response.

"Gentlemen, I will proceed to inform you of the peculiar business that is taking me and the partner of my joys and sorrows—there's about three of the

latter to one of the former—same mixture as is in that bottle, you know, sir," he added, looking wistfully at the countryman's pocket. "Remarkable coincidence, sir." He paused. The countryman made no sign. "I will relate, as I was saying, the important business as is taking me and the partner of my joys and sorrows—the only mixture as I don't find suitable to my constitution—to London." This last word was shouted out at the top of his voice. He bent over the coach as far as the strap permitted, and listened again.

A window opened below.

"Hold your tongue, sir."

"I've got her now. She can't come outside," he whispered with a curious leer.

"Its only wagging wi' thirst, Terry. It's so dry, you don't know."

"It must wag dry for some time yet. Mind I don't catch you talking of places again."

"Where's my breakfast, Terry?"

"It's at Leicester; and if you disturb the gentlemen with any talk, it'll be at St. Albans!"

The strapped traveller trembled. "Don't be hard, Terry. I'm mum if you'll give your word as it's all right at Leicester."

"I'll see about it."

"Mum's the word, Terry."

"So much the worse for you if it ain't." The bonnet disappeared, and the window was shut with a decisive click.

The captive never uttered a syllable again. He used his eyes, though; that is, he fixed them on the countryman's pocket. Evidently the rich and cultured prospect around had no charms for him.

"There's some mystery agate," whispered the man who had the pocket to Geoffrey.

The day passed away, evening came, and night. And then lights began to twinkle—few and far between. Then more lights, and at lesser intervals. Then lights seemed to be dotted about on every side, without order or method. They had reached London. It appeared to Geoffrey that they must be passing through the capital without stopping.

"Coachman, I'm getting down here."

"Here! I beg pardon, sir, I thought you were for Holborn?"

"Yes, Holborn in London."

"All right, sir, we ain't there yet."

What a huge city it must be! Geoffrey had had no conception of its size. On and on they went, street after street was traversed, and just when he was beginning to wonder whether coaches were ever lost in the great capital, and had to be advertised for, the vehicle stopped before a great red glaring lamp.

There was a great noise as of people's voices, and the tread of feet.

"I hope he's not been troublesome, sir?" said a tall lady to Geoffrey as she seized the arm of his shaky-looking companion.

"Oh no, thank you; he's been asleep for the last five hours." The red light shone on her face; it was unveiled. He thought he had seen it before. He could not think when or where. That she was or had been a lady he felt sure from the tone of her voice. It was hard and harsh, 'tis true, but there was that peculiar inflection about it which few can mistake.

"Where are you staying?" asked the lady.

"I am recommended to go to No. 16, Back Bolton Street; but I don't know where it is."

"That's not a pleasant neighbourhood. I know London well. If you will allow me to suggest such a thing, I will direct you to another place further off, and more westerly; but it is highly respectable, and the landlady, though French, is extremely attentive, and civil."

"You know her?"

"It is many years since we met. Once I knew her well. By birth she is a lady, but the world has gone somewhat hard with her, and she keeps a kind

of Pension. I am going there. You can have a seat in my coach."

There was no reason why Geoffrey should not accept the offer. He could help her with her luggage, and he was feeling all the strangeness of a first visit to the metropolis.

CHAPTER IV.

"Amongst our towns there is only London that bears the face of a city, *Epitome Britanniæ*, a famous emporium, second to none beyond seas, a noble mart; but *sola crescit, decrescentibus aliis*."—DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR.

IT was very late in the evening as the Kilverts, with Geoffrey in the rear, ascended a wide staircase in a large pile of buildings situate in Bristol Street. Various alterations in this quarter have now thrown this short and somewhat narrow road into the background. It is now as a still pool beside a swift current. The river rushes on within a few feet of it, and yet itself is all untouched. At the time of which we are writing, it was only known as a short cut between two fashionable thoroughfares, into one of which it ran at either extremity.

There were not many shops in it, nor was there anything to attract either the idle or the busy. There were no theatres, no restaurants, no musical saloons.

It was simply a conduit for the human tide. Nearly every block of buildings was composed of private dwelling-houses. The windows had the external green shutters so familiar to the Continent. There was a somewhat French look about it; and this feeling was not dispelled by the sight of a great lamp, with "Pension Anglaise" inscribed upon it, and "Grandperrot" as the owner, the letters being set in white against a red ground. The Pension Anglaise was the only building in Bristol Street which could be termed, under any wide scope of fancy, public. Certainly, it looked private enough.

At the time Geoffrey was first introduced to it, the street looked somewhat sombre and gloomy. The street-lamps were few and far between, for the powers that gave light to London did not care to spend money in an unfrequented thoroughfare.

It was astonishing how many flights of stairs the trio had to ascend before they came to a lighted landing. Geoffrey was filled with amazement.

The door was almost immediately opened to their ring. "Madame would attend upon them instantly." Thus saying, the *soubrette* ushered them into a room that would have looked more comfortable had it been less scantily and gaudily furnished. It was, like the little French woman who issued forth from an opposite door, overdressed and rouged. The gilded

chairs, and sofas, and footstools, and side-tables, all, with their owner, were suspicious of carmine. The lady herself wore a rich brocaded silk, with crimson flowers on a white ground. The silk was thick as leather. Such a material is unknown now. That silk would have stood on end. The wearer was very pleasant, though, and small and fat.

"You don't remember me, Marie?"

Madame had not the pleasure, but of course felt sure she must be very stupid not to remember such a face, having once seen it.

"I am Thérèse Kilvert—*née* Briccot."

The little lady put her right hand to her forehead, resting the elbow prettily on the palm of her left; looked sweetly abstracted; glanced up; screamed, as prima donnas scream on the stage, and then threw her arms round the new-comer.

"So long ago," she said, as if to deprecate her friend's anger. "If you had changed more I should have recognized you better. But one does not look for youth at—— Well, never mind, *ma chère*."

"This is my husband—and this is Mr.—Mr.——"

"Lexley," said Geoffrey. It seemed to him as if they must at once recognize him, and the story of his family disgrace. He paused, but he had never told a lie in his life. 'Twas but an instant, and then he gave his name—rather faintly, however, it seemed.

"Leslie. He wishes to board with you for a few days, if you have room. Can you take us all in?"

Madame would be delighted. She would show them their apartments at once, and supper would be ready at ten. Could they wait so long, or would they like to have something sent up to their bedrooms?

Ten would suit them well. So all was quickly arranged. Mrs. Kilvert had replied for the three, or Geoffrey would have asked for a private meal.

There might be about sixteen or eighteen people seated at a long table when Geoffrey entered the dining-room. He was somewhat surprised to see that most of them were English people, and that English was the tongue in which the conversation was generally wagging. He had been conducted by a waiter to the left hand of Mrs. Grandperrot. A stout gentleman of about sixty, florid of complexion, and wonderfully befrilled, faced her at the other end. He was a Frenchman, Monsieur Paschal by name, of independent means, for one whose tastes were of a quiet order—a retired *épicier*—and had been at the Pension Anglaise any time during the last ten or twelve years. He was making himself paternally agreeable to a young lady on his left.

"My daughter, Mr. Leslie," said the little lady, following his glance.

"Miss Louise? Mrs. Kilvert said you had a

daughter of that name," he added, seeing her surprise.

"Ah, yes. I had forgotten. I think she is pretty?" she said complacently.

"I am not sure," replied Geoffrey, boldly. Mrs. Grandperrot looked offended. "The word is unworthy. A doll is pretty. There is the expression of great inner beauty in Miss Grandperrot's face."

"Charming!" said the delighted lady. I must tell her."

"Oh no!" cried Geoffrey in dismay.

On the left of the young lady in question sate Mr. and Mrs. Kilvert—or rather, to maintain their relative order, Mrs. and Mr. Kilvert. Coming down the table, Geoffrey saw what appeared to be a family of eight, including a father, a mother, five up-grown daughters, and one son, aged about twenty-nine. They were a curious-looking group. The father stout, pompous, and yet nervous; the mother and daughters lean, spare, and wholly destitute of curves. All wore huge gold watch-chains round the neck. All had very light, colourless hair. Their eyebrows were upraised, as if at some preceding period of their lives a virulent attack of amazement had run through the family, and left the mark of its ravages behind —like measles, or small-pox, or any other eruptive malady. All, too, were helpless as regarded their

hands. For the life of them not one of the young ladies knew what to do with her hands. If they had not ranged from nineteen to twenty-seven one might have mistaken them for young misses fresh from school, with the atmosphere of discipline still upon them. They answered in monosyllables, and always whispered in conversation, speaking from the tips of their lips.

"Mr. Briggs and family, from Brixton, in Dampshire—originally 'Briggstown,' called after their ancestor. They only came in yesterday. He has been a builder, Mr. Jarvis says. That's Mr. Jarvis in the corner, down your own side of the table. Their first visit to the metropolis, of course." This was to Geoffrey.

But Geoffrey's eye fell back on Louise Grandperrot. She alone in the room, so far as he could see, had any claim to beauty. Her brown, thoughtful eye had once met his, and she had instantly shrunk back like a timid fawn. The contour of her face was oval; and her hair, by being kept well back, preserved the outline. Her nose was straight; her mouth and chin chiselled with an exquisite grace; her figure slight, but beautifully curved about the shoulders. She looked about eighteen. Geoffrey thought of Cécile, the only beauty he had ever known. He was a loyal youth; but he knew that Cécile Marnott was not to be set beside Louise Grandperrot.

The company adjourned to the drawing-room. It was not every day Mrs. Grandperrot had a handsome young gentleman in her *salon*. She kept close beside Geoffrey.

"Mr. Briggs, let me introduce you to a countryman—Mr. Leslie."

"Mr. Briggs of Briggston, ma'am," said that plethoric individual, with dignity.

"As is to be, Thomas. It's Brixton yet, you know," corrected his wife, who had come forward.

"Well, yes, I should say Brixton. The place has got corrupted, but not the family, and that's something to say, sir, I think. My friends have sometimes suggested that I should call myself 'Brix,' to identify my connection with the spot, and I did so for a few months; but my letters began to come addressed to 'Mr. Thomas Bricks.' I didn't like it, sir. I was a builder, sir, and I believe it was intended as a reflection on my profession."

"You went back to the ancestral name again?" asked Mrs. Grandperrot.

"I did. I am very anxious to recover its lost title to the place also. I believe I shall accomplish it. I shall see it called Briggston before I die, Jemima. This is my boy, sir—Thomas Briggs, junior, of Briggston, as is to be. Sounds fairly well, sir, doesn't it? We're travelling. Travelling opens the eyes, and elevates the—the——"

"Eyebrows seemingly," thought Geoffrey, looking at the daughters.

"The understanding," finished the builder, who had meantime stumbled for a word.

The adjournment was quickly made, and as if still under the protection of Mrs. Kilvert's wing, Geoffrey was shown into a private apartment, kept generally for Mrs. Grandperrot's special use and comfort.

It is curious how quickly an acquaintanceship is struck up when people are travelling in company. Geoffrey Lexley had been in no mood for new associates. It was not association he was seeking. But circumstances had thrown them together, and a kind of silent understanding had been established that the Kilverts and he were not to lose sight of one another for the present. Every one who has made a long journey knows how easily these temporary intimacies come about.

It may be asked what Geoffrey intended to do in London. Certainly, he had no distinct notion himself. He knew the capital was big, and a long way from Lackington. To be where no one—least of all Johnnie—should be able to find him, this one idea had occupied and filled his mind. He had a dim impression, too, that he was to find employment in the metropolis. He did not mind what it might be, provided it kept him from absolute starvation.

He had a curious, undefined pleasure, too, in being in the city where all these troubles had begun. Here this miserable state of things had originated a long time ago. If there had been no London there had been no Geoffrey Lexley taking up his quarters with Madame Grandperrot, and associated with two new acquaintances bearing the name of Kilvert. There had been no suffering, no separation, no fleeing from all he loved best and truest in this present world.

"The scenery was somewhat tame towards the last, Mr.——"

"Lexley," said Geoffrey, from the sofa. He was still ruminating, and answered low.

"Leslie. You naturally preferred the Peak?" Mrs. Kilvert was the speaker.

"Yes, I liked Debyshire," said Geoffrey, rousing himself; "it was so wild. But the rich pasturage of Leicestershire and Bedford was pleasant to look upon. Hedgerows with clusters of honeysuckle and foxgloves always please me. I think hedgerows are indispensable to English rural beauty."

"Is this your first visit to the metropolis?"

"I have never been more than twenty miles from home before."

"How strange! But these railways will alter all that. I am an old traveller."

"I thought so."

"Why?"

"There is that kind of knowingness about you, which I should think can only come of travel. I have seen no surprise in your face."

The lady laughed. "Well, I have seen much in my time; but not for many years. Most of my wanderings took place when I was younger than I am now. It is very easy to fall into a hole, and stick there. I have not left my home for nearly twenty years."

"Is it an out-of-the-way place?" asked Geoffrey.

"You may well say so. Nothing happens at Newsham. There are no such things as events there; and as for history, we cannot even tread on the skirt of her garment. We are out of the world."

"It must have been hard to settle down in such a place after a roving life." Geoffrey had started at the mention of Newsham.

"We had an object in so doing," said the other quietly.

"The motive has ceased, I presume, since you are travelling again?"

"It depends," said the lady, becoming more reserved. But a leading question like this was one that a young frank fellow of an unsuspicious turn was likely to ask, and she did not resent his curiosity. If he were older and more experienced in the world's

ways, he would know it was as dangerous to ask questions as to answer them. His simplicity attracted her. Apart from that, too, she had taken a liking to Geoffrey. He had honest, brown eyes, and a manly face and figure; yet withal there was a certain womanly tenderness in his look and ways which was peculiarly winning. He was sad, too; and no woman can look on a man's face that is sad without being drawn to him.

They said no more, and both fell into a reverie. Had Geoffrey been less weary and sleepy, he would have asked if Mrs. Kilvert's Newsham was the Lackington Newsham. But his eyes were already closing.

He fell asleep almost instantly after this, and dreamt he was at Lackington. Strange to say, he was very happy. Johnnie was there, and his father, and mother, and all were brimming over with happiness. He looked out of the window—that same window that had troubled him so much. The sky was blue; quite dense and deep and fathomless, so blue it was. At the end of the beech-wood there was a great, monster black cloud skirting the sky. But it did not frighten him, for it was descending silently and swiftly behind the hill. It looked as if it was ashamed to be there, and was skulking away without attracting observation if it could. He came back to the table and told his brother of it. Then they all

laughed again. Suddenly he was wide awake. It seemed as if a most familiar name had been uttered in his ear.

"You will own some day, Miles, that my plan has been the best."

"We've waited till it's too late."

"We have indeed waited long—and sometimes it's been weary waiting—but it's not too late. On the contrary, the time has come, and everything is ready."

"But we're getting old. There's so little time left to enjoy ourselves."

Mrs. Kilvert looked at her husband with contempt. "You would have drunk yourself to death long before this, if you had had your way in this matter. Be thankful that your life has been spared through your wife's wit."

"I canna deny as I'd have made a hole i' that money if I'd had a chance."

"A hole in the money! It would have made you a hole in the churchyard."

Her husband trembled. "Don't talk that way, Terry. I'm going to give over drinking, when the money comes."

Poor wretch! he had drunk till the will to abstain from drink had been quenched in drink. He would never have a will again of his own. Only earthly

compulsion, in the shape of a strait waistcoat, or heavenly pressure, in the form of an angel to wrest the cup from his lip, would ever rescue that man. He had ceased to have a will.

"Will it be much?" he said, still shivering.

"It shall be double what I intended a week ago. Cécile Marnott shall pay for her insolence as well as her inheritance."

"The more the better," said Miles, rubbing his hands. You could scarcely call it rubbing, there was so little that was voluntary in it—it was like the teeth chattering with cold. His look of satisfaction quickly fell. "You're sure the old gentleman doesn't know?"

"What, Mr. Grewby?"

"Yes."

"Not he. I was alarmed when I heard she was there. But it was a mere accident. That point was quite settled in the wood. But she shall pay for her insolence." What a hard, unforgiving look she had as she added this last sentence! How easily it sate upon her!

"You hate women as much as ever, Terry," said her husband curiously.

"There are few things I do not hate," she assented quietly.

"You're a hard woman, Terry."

"Very." Said slowly and deliberately.

"I wonder if religion would soften you? You've not been in a place o' worship for o'er twenty years—eh?"

"No. I believe there's a God, though; but not a God of Circumstance—what is called Providence. He would have shaped my life differently, if He had existed."

"Haven't you shaped your own life, Terry?"

"Yes," she said bitterly; "but a God of Circumstance should prevent us from shaping our own lives."

"But you're always talking about your will. You say, 'If I'd not had a will of my own, Miles, you'd have spoilt this one chance of making our fortunes.' You're all for your own will, you know."

"Providence should see that we never make a mistake, Miles, whatever our will may be. That is the grudge I owe Providence. I might have been a soft, tender-hearted, happy woman but for Providence."

"I'm not a parson, of course. But there must be a weak place in a argument like that. Seems to me you speak like a child who has persisted in putting its finger in the fire-grate, and then's peevish because he's hurt. Of course I only suggest such a thing. You're so clever."

"Just to think of it," she said musingly—she

seldom listened to anything her husband said. "I might have been a happy woman, but—for another woman! What a tender, unselfish woman I should have been!" The moon was rising. A silver beam fell on her face. It was steeped in a smile, so sweet, so gentle, so heavenly, it seemed as though she herself was not, and some other was there in her stead. It was but an instant. The hard look returned, and with its coming the moonbeam fled, as if affrighted.

This conversation had all been uttered in whispers. They had taken this precaution, although they were perfectly satisfied that Geoffrey was fast asleep. But he had caught every word. Not a single syllable had escaped him. He would watch these people. He could scarcely refrain from springing at the woman's throat at one point of her converse. But for Cécile's sake he did not. The thought of Cécile as his possible wife seemed like a thing of long ago to him now. Nevertheless, for their past friendship's sake, and for Johnnie's sake, who had spoken as if he would try to woo her, he would jealously guard her interests. There was a plot against her in some way, that was evident. He had a right to listen. He would still feign sleep. Something more might yet be said. What could they mean about money? What money could possibly come to Cécile? What a strange, mysterious thing that he, of all men, should

overhear this conversation! No God of Circumstance indeed? Why, He was at work at this very moment!

Miles Kilvert emitted a laugh. There had been a pause. It disturbed the silence. It was short, and sudden, and sharp, like the cracking of a whip.

"Well, what is it?" The hard voice again. Oh, how hard it was!

"I said you'd not bin in a place o' worship for twenty years."

"Nor have I."

"What about Lackington church? Ha, ha!"

"Not so loud, Miles. That doesn't count. There was no service going on. They have no midnight rites in Protestant places of worship—except the Methodists, when they watch the New Year in."

"Still you was inside. How you did come over that fellow—what's his name?"

"Mr. Curling."

"Ay, that's it."

"No great difficulty to do that," Mrs. Kilvert said, with a contemptuous smile. "I knew from the time that he came to see us after James's death that he would never get on the track."

"You were frightened, too, when you heard as he'd gone to London."

"Only for a moment. It was impossible he could do anything without me."

"The Grandperrots?"

"He did not know of their existence."

"He might have heard of them some way, you know. Such things do come about sometimes."

"He could only have heard through James; and, thanks to me, you did not let out that part of the secret. I could have killed you that night, Miles."

Her companion trembled. "You did not, anyhow," he replied, affecting a laugh.

"No, I did not," she said calmly. "You revealed enough to create suspicion, but not to endanger my plans."

"It was the drink that did it, Terry. I was awful that night," her husband put in pleadingly.

"Yes, that was it, of course," she assented quietly. She seemed to have a profound contempt for the man beside her, and yet at times she treated him with a rough kindness.

Geoffrey now remembered where he had seen Mrs. Kilvert before. It was the night he went from Johnnie's room to see the white marble relief. She was in the church with Isaac Curling. It was their candle that lit up and illumined the knight and child.

After this it seemed as if Mr. and Mrs. Kilvert, too, were inclined to sleep. But Mrs. Grandperrot came in, bearing a pair of candles. All got up. How Geoffrey's limbs ached with fatigue!

"Good-night, Marie. I congratulate you upon Louise. She is more than pretty."

The little Frenchwoman's eyes glistened at the compliment.

"Mr. Leslie must be careful," she said, laughing.

"Suppose I have left my heart behind me?" put in Geoffrey, smiling.

"I know no parcel so easily forwarded. Good-night. Pleasant dreams."

CHAPTER V.

"Know then, my name is Douglas."
1 *Henry IV.*

GEOFFREY'S room was in the skylight. He had never been so high in his life before. Mrs. Grandperrot made many apologies for its narrow proportions and somewhat scanty furniture. But these were its only drawbacks. The truckle-bed was a luxurious couch to the wearied traveller; and as for all else, scrupulous cleanliness reigned supreme. Geoffrey was asleep almost ere his head touched the pillow; nor did he wake into consciousness again till the morning sun had scaled its accustomed heights so far as to be able to dart a shaft of light directly into the face of our young country-man. He couldn't resist its blandishments, and woke.

Very jaded he must have been to fall so easy a prey to slumber, for he had heard much to excite him. Good excuse had he to have lain wakeful

through all the watches. He had set foot upon a trail that might lead him into a great and wonderful discovery. Already Cécile Marnott was to him as a vision of long ago. It was wonderful how his *amour propre* had been touched when he found out that his ardent avowal of affection had in nowise been met on her side. Had she been slightly wounded it would have been different. But she had refused him—not roughly, but distinctly and deliberately. When he left her she was perfectly whole in heart as in limb. Accustomed to override all opposition, he had not been without soreness on this matter.

But none the less did the conversation he had overheard affect him in her interests. He would unravel this mystery, and at once. It was his first thought as he sprang refreshed from his bed. He dressed hurriedly; he was already in pursuit of the quarry. When he came downstairs he found the company at breakfast. A chair was found for him by Mrs. Grandperrot. Louise was not there.

Mrs. Grandperrot suggested that, as he was a stranger to the place, he had better go under her wing; for she had some shopping to do which would take her through some of the principal thoroughfares. Geoffrey assented with some eagerness. He was glad for a short time to be freed from Mrs. Kilvert's company. He was afraid she might discover his locality,

and thus he would lose the opportunity of quietly watching her, in behalf of Cécile, against whom he felt some plot was being hatched. To his dismay that lady, finding they were going out, proposed that she should join them. There was no help for it, of course, and they started.

Geoffrey had half hoped that Louise would accompany them. He had not seen her that day. He made allusion to the fact.

"My daughter still goes to school. That is, she teaches French at a large seminary not very far from here, and receives lessons in Italian and music, by way of recompense. She is under Monsieur Guillemin, and he is very proud of his pupil. She returns in time for dinner at seven."

"I begin to recognize some of these buildings," said Mrs. Kilvert, as they passed along a once fashionable outlet to the west. That house, with the pilasters, was the Bancroft's. What a colony of Brockshire families resided within a few yards of this spot."

"Do you remember the Archiballs? The second daughter was excessively pretty—married Sir Charles Sumner, of the 'Guards.'"

"They lived at the corner there. Next to them came the Miltons. Young Milton went to India. He, and Lieutenant Grewby, and Mr. Ralph Lexley were very close friends for awhile."

"Ah, yes, I remember. We used to call them the 'three dis-graces.' They were a wild set."

"Two of them were. Mr. Lexley's intimacy with them was accidental. He lived near the Grewbys at home in England. He and Lieutenant Grewby never really agreed. Their tastes were wholly dissimilar."

"Yes, I found that afterwards. Nevertheless, I never liked Mr. Lexley."

"I had forgotten—forgive me. I have confined my memory to one object—too much, to remember others."

Geoffrey had given a great start when first his father's name was mentioned. He was utterly astounded. He had joined companionship with those who could unravel everything. It was quite evident that these two could tell him all that there was to tell. They had lived in the very street, at the very time; they had seen, and from what he could fathom, had conversed with his father during that very period which had beheld him sinking into the current that had drifted him into his great transgression. Evidently Mrs. Grandperrot herself had some sore reminiscences of the affair. Perhaps she knew Johnnie's mother, and felt aggrieved against his father.

They went from shop to shop, and from street to street. Many a point of interest was shown to him; amongst others, a house wherein Louise was even

now employed at her duties. But he heard very much as one who heard not.

"Mr. Leslie is overwhelmed with the splendours of our capital," said Mrs. Grandperrot.

"I have discovered a secret. His heart is in the country," asserted her companion.

Geoffrey laughed faintly. "Perhaps there is truth in both statements. I certainly plead guilty to the first charge. London transcends all I could have imagined or dreamt of. "I must correct a slight mistake," he added firmly. "My name is Lexley, not Leslie; and Mr. Ralph Lexley, of whom you have been speaking, is my father."

Had a bombshell fallen upon them, the two ladies could not have been thrown into greater consternation.

"I thought you said Leslie," said Mrs. Kilvert, fiercely.

"There was not time to correct the mistake. I intended to do so last night, but I did not get an opportunity."

The walk home was a silent one. No one seemed to care to speak. Mrs. Grandperrot's face wore a serious look. Mrs. Kilvert was somewhat thickly veiled, for there was a strong wind, and the dust flew in every direction. But even she could not hide an aspect of alarm.

The two ladies instantly retired, and together, leaving Geoffrey to his own devices. He was not quite positive that honour demanded that he should discover his name; but he felt assured that his disclosure had ruined his hopes of elucidating the mystery connected with Cécile Marnott. As regarded his father and Johnnie he felt less concern. If he could but find out the church where the marriage took place that should have been solemnized two years earlier, he should be independent of their aid; and there were but two or three churches in the neighbourhood that were not of recent erection. To-morrow he would employ his time in the search.

The dinner was a very imposing affair. Very long and very dull, Geoffrey thought. Mrs. Grandperrot seemed absorbed in her right-hand companion, a pale, elderly man, with an unmistakably Polish air. The same order was preserved. Geoffrey sat by the lady of the house—Louise sitting beside the Frenchman—the Kilverts and Briggses flanking the rest of that side of the table. There was one change, and only one. Young Briggs sat between Miss Grandperrot and the Kilverts. He was evidently smitten with the younger lady. Not a single attention did he offer Mrs. Kilvert. The world on his left, including his parents and sisters, might have been a blank for all he knew or cared.

He was not a brilliant specimen of his sex or nation. There was a decidedly horsey, doggy, ratty expression about him. To give any account of his features separately were useless. Attention was concentrated on his moustache, and remained so. It demanded it; it deserved it. What a moustache it was! What manipulation had been there! Carefully and cosmetically trained, its attenuations were exquisitely proportionate; its extremities magnificently rectilinear. It was red—very red—blazingly red. Indeed, in physique and colour it strongly resembled a familiar kitchen esculent, that shall be nameless—or rather two of them. There was no doubt that Lieutenant Briggs had a most extraordinary moustache. Whether it added beauty to his face is another matter. It may be presumed that the owner thought so. His trousers—not that they were visible just now—were excessively tight, fitting like a second skin; strapped, too, under the heel to the point of disruption. He wore a pin to his neck-cloth, decorated with a huge spur of gilt silver. And the ring on the little finger of his left hand was emblazoned with a horse's shoe, almost big enough for a Shetland pony. He had an easy, pushing, bullying manner in conversation, and pushed his moustache into his companion's face in such an offensive way, as to make Geoffrey wish Mrs. Grandperrot would invite him over

to the other side, with the set purpose of kicking him. Indeed, he once thought she gave him an imploring, beseeching glance of this nature; but, of course, that must have been a mistake.

In the drawing-room things were no better. Mr. Thomas Briggs had ensconced himself in a chair beside Louise, who was at work with some wools. What a bold, intrusive way he had! He looked superciliously several times at Geoffrey. Evidently he thought he was cutting him out, and was not displeased at the idea.

"Who is that—aw—meek-eyed youth by the piano—aw?" he said in a whisper loud enough to be heard by the young man, and addressing his question to Louise.

"Mr. Lex—— Oh, hush, sir!" cried Louise, overwhelmed with confusion. She was sure Geoffrey must have heard him.

"Lex—aw—let me see, that means 'Law,' doesn't it? Must be—aw—ignorant of the laws of good society, or he would not stare so much this way. He's jealous of my success—aw——" The officer stroked his moustache, and looked down boldly into the girl's face.

"Sir, pray explain yourself." Miss Grandperrot's brown eyes looked grand in their anger.

"Beg pardon, Miss. I only meant that he's

irritated because I have forestalled him in engrossing your company—delightful, I'm sure—aw——"

"Not to such an extent as to prevent me offering to take Miss Grandperrot's wool on my hands, while she winds it, if she will permit me," said Geoffrey, bowing courteously, and extending those same digital members.

Louise blushed, and looked her thanks. She changed her position at once, giving her back to the builder's son. He, thoroughly discomfited, seemed disposed to bluster; changed his mind, scowled on Geoffrey, and turned on his heel.

Geoffrey chatted for an hour at least with Louise Grandperrot. It seemed to him in that short hour he had learnt to know her better than Cécile Marnott after three months of acquaintanceship. And yet she had not been forward. On the contrary, she was somewhat shy. But somehow—perhaps it was the way in which they had begun their conversation—they seemed to have skipped all the formalities of acquaintanceship. They were already friends. Of course this kind of thing saves a great deal of time. Nevertheless, be careful, my young friends, for ye are but young, and—— But no croaking at the end of a chapter.

No one particularly watched them except Mrs. Grandperrot. Lieutenant Briggs had disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

"Give me the paper—let me read the same."
Love's Labour's Lost.

GEOFFREY got up the next morning in much brighter mood. He had lain awake all night, and had changed his plans. He would go home again. His influence over Johnnie was very powerful, and his plan was this. He would allow himself to be heir in the eyes of the world. But when the day arrived for him to enter upon his inheritance—in a word, when his father died—Johnnie should live at the Grange as ostensible possessor, receive the Grange revenues, and spend them as he listed. He himself would settle down in the new house which once he had hoped to live in, with Cécile for his wife; and he would thrive, he doubted not, as sharer with Johnnie in the proceeds of the mill. Johnnie would be the only obstacle; but had he not ruled his brother all his life? People, of course, would still talk, and rumours

would spread. But people in course of time died, and reports were still more subject to mortality.

He was surprised that he had not thought of this before. He sprang up with fresh spirit. He felt absolutely gay. His pathway lay clear before him. First he would see this terrible register, and satisfy that peculiar craving which he had to behold the dreaded document which was the seat of so much family distress. He would in the mean while keep his eyes open, and perhaps he might learn something relative to that mysterious conversation he had heard upon the diligence. If he failed to gather information directly from Mrs. Kilvert, or her husband, he would make a *confidante* of Mrs. Grandperrot; and if that came to nought, he would see Isaac Curling the moment he had reached home. It was just possible that although the genealogist had been played upon by the Kilverts, he might, through him, be able to collect some of the tangled threads, and, with what he had already gathered himself, reach the clue he wanted.

He was surprised to find himself coldly received by Mrs. Grandperrot. The Kilverts, too, were constrained and stiff.

"I find that I shall have to ask you to take rooms elsewhere, Mr. Lexley. I forgot to tell you that a family of four from Birmingham would be here this

evening. We are so quiet that I know you will be pleased. It was cruel of Mrs. Kilvert to inveigle you into such a dull atmosphere." She tried to speak carelessly, but scarcely succeeded.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Grandperrot," said Geoffrey frankly. "I had begun to feel quite at home." And his eye involuntarily went in search of Louise. She met it, and flushed up prettily.

"It was very kind of the gentleman to say so." That was all the reply vouchsafed.

"Miles, you had better sit by me." Miles went tamely to the other side of the table from Geoffrey, and seated himself by his wife. He had been very submissive since he arrived at the Pension. He was more sensible than Geoffrey had seen him before.

"Can you recommend me to a quiet hotel?" he asked by-and-by of his hostess.

"There is the St. Martin Hotel, in Britannia Street, by the Globe Arcade. Just the place for you. Cheerful company."

"Is it not a long drive from here, mamma?"

Mrs. Grandperrot did not seem pleased with the reminder. "Coaches are not expensive in London, dear," was all she said.

Geoffrey inwardly determined that he would not go to the hotel dedicated to St. Martin. Nor would he seek further advice—at least, not from

this quarter. Mrs. Grandperrot and Mrs. Kilvert wanted to get him as far away from them as possible. This he was quite sure of. He would start out immediately after breakfast, find rooms for himself in one of the adjacent streets, and from thence go in quest of the church so nearly connected with his family troubles. He had already a line to follow. If the Lexleys were wont to stay in the street pointed out yesterday, he must begin by inquiring for the place of worship that lay nearest to this same spot.

As he went out, he saw Louise in front. He strode quickly forward and overtook her.

"You are on the way to school, I suppose?" he said.

Then Miss Grandperrot and he walked, talking on various subjects. They lingered a minute or two to look at some of the treasures set to view in the windows of a large goldsmith's shop. They passed admiring comments on the bracelets and necklaces; wondered, and then ceased to wonder why the nurses, with their flocks of prettily costumed children, should be so early abroad. The wonder was they did not linger here throughout the day, and then take up abode in one of the arcades to be ready for next morning's fill of gazing again at costly jewellery, and a thousand cheaper trinkets. Rare stones, indeed! They were scattered about like pebbles. Precious

gems! They might have been cockle-shells. Only you might not pick them up; that was all!

"Is there any church in this immediate neighbourhood?"

"I am not sure. I think there is. The one mamma and I go to is close to the Pension, behind Britannia Square."

"You are not Protestants?" inquired Geoffrey with some surprise.

"Oh yes. Grandmamma was a Protestant. Aunt Rachel was a Catholic. She was brought up with grandpapa. Mamma lived always with grandmamma, and went to the chapel with her."

"And it lies close to the Pension, does it?"

"Yes; not more than a hundred yards away. You go through the square, and it lies at the rear. You can see the little cupola overtopping the houses."

"Have you always lived in Bristol Street?"

"Oh yes; never anywhere else. I love it dearly. Grandpapa lived there. But he did not keep a pension. He was a physician, and his consulting-room lay below."

It was wonderful how rapidly these two had begun to exchange confidences. Before they had got to the seminary Geoffrey had poured out half his troubles. He did not tell her the causes that had led to his arrival in London, but Louise readily understood they

were not of a pleasurable kind. He described his home and his early life. He spoke of Johnnie, and their deep attachment the one to the other. He depictured his astonishment when he discovered how big a place was London; his fear that they were got through it, when they had but reached the northern suburb. He touched lightly upon his meeting with the Kilverts, and the eccentricities of the pair. He spoke of his loneliness, so far separated from home, and friends, and kindred. Wise Geoffrey! How instinctively men set about winning a woman's sympathy! Louise was so sorry for him, that she had nearly put out her hand to tell him so. Her big brown eyes became quite earnest in their sad thoughtfulness.

Confidence begets confidence. It was her turn now. She told him in pretty, quaint simplicities of words and phrases—just such words and phrases as one who might be half English, half French, English in gravity, French in piquancy, would do—all her yet brief and uneventful history. There had, so far, nothing occurred to disturb the even calm of her life. Her experience had been that of a sheltered summer pool. Primroses had grown around its margin—not too many, but enough for her to know what primroses were. The great trees had shielded her from any violent outbursts of storm or rain—that is, her

mother had taken great care of her. The flies had been occasionally troublesome, and teased the water's surface, but nothing worse than flies had come near—that is, she could not remember a single afflictive incident to speak of. Her life had been pleasantly but somewhat tamely led. There was just the faintest shadow of impatience in her tone. If summer pools had some suspicion of running sparkling brooks, and all the fresh and sweet varieties of a rivulet's career, it would perhaps represent Louise Grandperrot's feelings. She was placidly happy, but in her heart there was an instinctive craving for less monotony. Water was made to flow—so were lives.

Before Geoffrey and Louise parted, they stood already in sweet peril; that is to say, both were silently agreed in their hearts that they had had a most enjoyable walk. Never had that long trudge from home to school seemed so short to the girl of eighteen.

Geoffrey—his companion having disappeared—was fully determined to go straight to this church behind the square. Nothing was more likely than that this should be the place of which he was in search. He walked quickly—how much more quickly than when he was by the side of Miss Grandperrot!—in the direction of the Pension. He did not stop this time to gaze into windows, or to stare at fountains, or

to admire bunches of flowers proffered by prettily dressed children.

No. He would see this register at once. He had already lingered too long. He knew why he had done so. He feared to see it. He had come to the capital with one set purpose in his heart, and now when he was there he was afraid to fulfil it. But this morning there was an impetus in him to get it over; to see the document, and to return and make these new arrangements with his brother.

What a strapping pace he put on! Looking neither before nor behind, as he retraced his route, he reached the now familiar corner of Bristol Street, and was taking the sharp turn when he nearly knocked over Mrs. Kilvert. She, too, had been walking fast.

"A narrow escape for me, Mr. Lexley," she said, somewhat crossly, he thought.

"For both," he added, a little mischievously.

"Your business must be urgent," she said.

"Very. I trust yours is more pleasant." He bowed and passed on.

How rapidly these Kilverts and Grandperrots, with the exception of Louise—what beautiful brown eyes she had!—had changed towards him since he had corrected their mistake about his name! How apprehensive Mrs. Kilvert had been when her husband would have sat beside him this morning! As for

Louise's mother, she was all anxiety to get rid of him. It was clear either that he had become personally disagreeable to them, through some act of his own, or that his presence, as Ralph Lexley's son, called up memories that were unwelcome, if not absolutely distasteful. As soon as he had seen the register he would look after a room in the neighbourhood. To-morrow was Sunday, so he would require it for two nights. He would like to be where he could have a chance of seeing or meeting Miss Grandperrot again. How beautiful she was! What soft brown eyes! How kind and sympathetic she had been!

"Is this St. Martin's?" he asked of a man who was sweeping a long, thin strip of carpet.

"Yes. Would you like to see inside? Very remarkable church. Has the plainest interior of any church or chapel in London." This was asserted with supreme pride. To be doorkeeper of such a remarkable sanctuary was evidently a high function in his eyes.

They entered together.

"It does not look very old," said Geoffrey, staring at a whitewashed ceiling, four whitewashed walls, several rows of deep and dark pews, and a pulpit.

"About eighty years."

"Do many marriages take place here?" Geoffrey inquired, as the clerk brought out the register, and laid it on the table.

"Very few. Sometimes not more than three in one year. This is the only book in use since the church was built, and we are not a third through it." The man—a somewhat old man he seemed—put his spectacles on, and having asked the date, turned over the leaves slowly one by one. Geoffrey looked over his shoulders.

"There it is!" the latter suddenly cried. And there sure enough it was. The names stood out very distinctly; the ink black, the indenture round and clerkly. Ralph Lexley and Rachel Passavant. Geoffrey had never known her surname. It was one he had neither heard nor seen before. He looked through the open door of the sacristy into the chancel. He could see the rails, and the communion-table with its crimson cloth. He seemed to fall into a reverie. He went back into past years, and pictured to himself the scene. His father would stand there, Johnnie's mother there, Johnnie himself, perhaps. Ah, no—a vivid flush overspread his cheek—he, of course, would be kept out of the way.

"Marie Passavant is one witness; Nathan Williams, my predecessor, is the other."

"May I have a copy of this register?" Geoffrey asked.

"Certainly, sir," he said, opening a drawer for a blank form. This is the second I have written out

this morning—not of this, of course; but the other is close at hand. Why, if that ain't strange! It's the very next after; only one's in the right-hand corner at the bottom, and the other over the page at the top. She was rather agitated, I think; for she snatched it out of my hand, and said something about having waited many a long year for it. I asked her why she had not got it before? She said she had had no need of it until now."

"She's a claim to some money, I suppose?" said Geoffrey, carelessly.

"Very likely," added the other.

Among the blank forms that lay on the table was one half filled. Geoffrey's eye fell on it. He picked it up absently, and looked at it. "Thérèse Briccot" and "Miles Kilvert" was all that was written upon it.

"How did this come here?" he asked, in astonishment.

The clerk took off his spectacles, and laughed very heartily. Evidently he feared lest his burst of merriment might relax the muscles of his face, and cause them to fall—and he was a cautious, methodical kind of man—therefore he took them carefully from his nose before he indulged his mirth. "These two were the witnesses to the marriage, but the lady would talk to me, and, being flustered, I put them down in the bride and bridegroom's place. It turned

out that she was Thérèse Briccot herself, and afterwards was married to the other witness. No very great mistake, after all, was it? Ha, ha!"

"And was this the marriage to which they stood as witnesses?" Geoffrey asked, turning to the other side of the page of the register, and scanning the first two or three lines.

He was just wondering if he could be dreaming, or was actually in his senses, when a hand was laid roughly upon his shoulder. He looked up. It was Mrs. Kilvert herself. She was in a frenzy of passion. Her eyes literally blazed with fire.

"How dare you read that register?" she almost shrieked, covering the entry with her left hand.

"I do not understand you," said Geoffrey; but he scarcely heard her.

"You have followed me. You have read it. I can see it in your face."

"I have—that is, I have read it; but I have not followed you," replied the young man. Even now he was not thinking of the woman before him. Her fury was lost upon him. He was thinking of the register, or that part of it which was covered by Mrs. Kilvert's hand.

"You will make use of this knowledge?" She looked with terrible earnestness on Geoffrey.

"I shall certainly do that which on reflection shall

seem right to be done. This should never have been a secret at all. Injury has been inflicted on several innocent persons; especially on Miss Marnott.

"I have known it from the first. I was witness to the marriage. I have had a purpose in keeping it a secret. None but myself shall discover it. Do you hear me? None but myself shall reveal it."

"I certainly hear you, but I refuse to be bound to any course of action."

"You will go back to Lackington and relate what you have found out by surreptitious and dishonourable means."

"How dishonourable?"

"You have watched me, and dogged my steps to this church."

"I have already denied the charge. I came here on a different errand."

"I don't believe it."

"I could prove it; but I shall not condescend to any further conversation with one who doubts my honour. If your charge were true, there would be no disgrace in the act. Every man is bound to see justice done, and to trace wrong."

"Mr. Lexley, I warn you."

"Thank you. I must now say good morning. I will take a copy of this other entry," he said, turning to the clerk, who sat silent and amazed at the scene.

Mrs. Kilvert watched, with a livid look of passion on her face, while the copy was made out. Twice she seemed bent on snatching the paper from the sacristan's desk. But she refrained herself.

Geoffrey went out, holding the two certificates firmly in his hand.

He had not walked more than fifty yards when he remembered he was going in a wrong direction. He prepared to cross the road. He was in one of the busiest and most crowded thoroughfares. Here three streets met, and vehicles of all sizes and descriptions were going and coming at all angles. Men were dodging under horses' heads; ladies were seeking the aid of policemen to pilot them across. It was noon; just when the confusion was at its highest. Suddenly Geoffrey saw a man gesticulating to him. He turned round. Mrs. Kilvert was all but upon him, her eyes flashing with excitement, her features convulsed with an overmastering fury. Her arm was upraised.

He sprang aside. She fell forward to the pavement. In another instant, and before any one could interpose to save her, she was being trampled upon by two horses; and then one of the wheels of a heavily freighted omnibus went over her. There was a single cry, a quiver of the body, and she lay motionless.

A crowd was around in a moment, and plenty of

willing hands. Mrs. Kilvert was carefully carried into a restaurant close by, and a doctor was fetched.

"Does any one know her name and address?"

"Her name is Kilvert, and she is staying at the Pension des Anglaise, in Bristol Street." This was Geoffrey.

"That is fortunate. Just round the corner."

The poor woman was tenderly borne to the Grandperrots. Geoffrey helped the men, and then ran in front to forewarn the people at the Pension. When the men reached the house everything was in readiness.

Several doctors were soon in consultation; and amputation of the right leg, below the thigh, was determined upon as the only chance of saving her life.

CHAPTER VII.

"Death's a fearful thing."
Measure for Measure.

"THIS is very terrible, Mr. Lexley. How did it happen?"

"I hardly know. Mrs. Kilvert came behind me as I was crossing the street. She seemed excited"—Geoffrey would not say she was in the act of striking him—"and, as I made way for her, she fell, and was overrun by an omnibus. Does her husband know?"

"Yes; but he is not in a state to realize the calamity. He is partially drunk, and we have put him in the small breakfast-room. He cannot see her at present. The doctor absolutely forbids it."

"Is she conscious?"

"No. The operation will be commenced in ten minutes. The surgeons are in the dining-room. I am so thankful it will be over before Louise comes in. You will stay with us, Mr. Lexley?"

"I shall be glad to do so," said Geoffrey, gravely. "And if Mrs. Kilvert should express any wish to see me—it is quite possible," he added, meeting Mrs. Grandperrot's look quietly but firmly—"you can say that I shall be ready to come at any instant."

"You have not had a quarrel—a *fracas* in the open street, have you?"

"Not in the street."

"Where, then?"

"In the church behind the square. She came in while I was getting a marriage-certificate from the clerk."

Mrs. Grandperrot's face fell. She became agitated.

"What certificate—what marriage?"

"That of my father with Miss Passavant. You knew them both, Mrs. Grandperrot—did you not?"

She was taken aback by the suddenness of the question. She seemed inclined to parry the thrust; but after a short silence said, "Yes, I certainly knew Miss Passavant."

"And my father?"

"Yes, I knew Mr. Lexley also."

"It was an unhappy connection, was it not?"

"Very." Mrs. Grandperrot was quiet again. She spoke subduedly.

"Did you ever see their child—Johnnie Lexley he is called at home?" Geoffrey's lips quivered.

"Yes. I have nursed him occasionally."

"Oh, Mrs. Grandperrot, you can tell me much that I do not know. You can relate details. I see it in your face, the knowledge of which you are not inclined to impart to me. Why is it?"

"I do not see on what grounds you come to such a conclusion, Mr. Lexley."

"I read it in your face. I know it because you wanted me to leave your house so soon as you heard my name."

"My rooms were let a fortnight ago to a Birmingham family." Mrs. Grandperrot looked discomposed.

"But you can give me a room now that Mrs. Kilvert is ill; and yet an extra chamber will be required for them, as her husband cannot be with her."

"It is true I had reasons for wishing you out of the house. I will not conceal from you, Mr. Lexley, that your presence awakens many painful recollections. Memories that had become happily buried beneath the weight of other and more peaceful cares, surge up once more when I see one of your family. My associations with your father were not pleasant. We quarrelled the last time we saw one another."

"And cannot you tell me anything?" Geoffrey spoke imploringly. Every word she had said only

drew him closer to her. He felt as if there was some invisible connection between him and Mrs. Grandperrot. Her associations with his father and Johnnie's mother were evidently of the closest kind. She had nursed his brother.

"I will think about it, Mr. Lexley." This closed their conversation, for a knock was heard at the door. Mrs. Grandperrot was wanted.

When Louise returned that afternoon, all was over. The operation had been performed, and satisfactorily, so far as itself was concerned. But the doctors were uneasy about the invalid. She was in a state of semi-consciousness, but her pulse was very high, and fever threatened. She was very restless, too, and talked incessantly; sometimes intelligibly, and then again there seemed to be a meaningless iteration of words. There was no pause; she never ceased muttering. Her countenance was still fixed with a look of mingled hatred and chagrin. Her eyes rolled about red and flaming.

"There's no chance for her if fever set in. Any excitement will kill her in her present state." The physician was a kind-hearted man, little and thin. He went downstairs. "I will fetch a trained nurse. I know of one disengaged. I will be back in ten minutes."

Dr. Michelot—that was his name—stayed the

whole evening, and then left the invalid in charge of the professional attendant. All his instructions had been clearly given. Mrs. Kilvert, too, was much calmer. The fever was abating.

Throughout the whole of that evening Geoffrey and Louise were left to keep one another company. Mrs. Grandperrot came in several times, but did not interrupt them. Whatever thought of danger might be in her mind she had apparently put aside to-night. Perhaps, she remembered that she had besought Geoffrey to stay. Perchance, she reflected that his sojourn would be of the shortest. She had already heard him express a wish to be at home again. She liked him. It was that very feeling of attraction that had made her anxious for his going. She did not wish to like any member of the Lexley family. I am not sure that mothers are the first to foresee the possible outcome of a quickly ripened intimacy. A mother can scarcely be classed among lookers-on—she has too many other household cares for that—and yet it is lookers-on who are said to see most of the game; and some games are very serious things. It is spinsters, or childless wives, or mothers who are spending their time among other mothers' children, who are so quick-scented, whose eyes are so sharp, whose tongues are so ready with the whisper, "I don't wish to pry into family secrets, Jane, but I

should be careful, if I were you, how I asked that young fellow—Frank, was that the name?—to the house. He was very marked in his attentions to Alice." Mrs. Grandperrot, in any case, whether she suspected or did not suspect anything, was for all practical purposes blind upon this evening.

The young folk did not waste their time. The Briggses were all out at the opera. The Frenchman was at a *café*, fast asleep, with a cigar in his mouth. Mr. Kilvert had been persuaded to go to bed. He was even now snoring out his drunken fit. The Birmingham people had not yet arrived. Mrs. Grandperrot, as aforesaid, was busy—partly with the invalid, partly in preparation for the new-comers. The two were alone in the *salon*. There was no music; that was out of the question. There was no loud talking. One gets into a way of whispering when there has come a sudden sickness and possible death in the house. You may be in the cellar, and the sick one in the top attic; still, till the newness of feeling has worn off, you will talk under your breath. These two, Louise and Geoffrey, whispered the whole evening. I believe if they had talked in tones less barely audible, they would have dwelt on topics less tenderly susceptible, and, as a matter of course, in a less confidential manner. However, their excuse was at hand. This injury to Mrs. Kilvert was not of their ordering.

The next day was Sunday. Mrs. Kilvert was still said to be better. Her husband had been allowed to see her, and there had been two minutes of whispered conversation. He came out very much sobered, and his shattered face looked bleached and pale. But Geoffrey could not utter any condolences, for he strictly and carefully avoided him.

The Misses Briggs were desirous to attend a particular church where a well-known preacher held forth. Louise had recommended him, and they asked her to accompany them. The lieutenant, hearing this, was seized with a sudden conviction that he ought to go with his sisters. He waylaid Miss Grandperrot at the door. To Geoffrey's wonder she seemed to acquiesce readily in the arrangement, and kept by his side the whole of the way. She did not sit by him, but she seated herself between two of his sisters, and altogether seemed to ignore her new friend, although he had accompanied her by express invitation; for an understanding had been come to the previous evening in the *salon* that she was to take him to hear the Rev. Norris MacKenzie, who was a very eloquent preacher, and the kindest of pastors. So affectionately had she spoken of him, that Geoffrey had been quite anxious to see whether he were young or old, handsome or plain.

Geoffrey felt neglected. Three days previously

he had never seen her, and yet already he had got to the stage of feeling neglected by Louise Grandperrot!

At breakfast she had dropped her glance very suddenly when he had met it just over the milk-jug. There had been a strange look of mingled confusion and wonder in her face. Once he had caught her regarding him with an aspect of the most startled interest, not to say curiosity. But she avoided him when breakfast was over, for all that.

During the entire day, there was a heightened flush on her cheek. She seemed to be lost in surprise —as if some novel and unexpected discovery had come to her, and she could not get over it. She would suddenly break out into a half smile, and then as hastily smooth down her face into circumspection again. She appeared to watch her mother closely, as if to copy her mood and tone. She had expressly told him that she always sat reading in the *salon* on Sunday afternoon, unless poverty or sickness took her on some errand of mercy in the streets that lay behind the Pension. Geoffrey had said he should be there also, and she had made no reply; but he had felt sure she was not displeased at the thought. Nevertheless, he saw nothing of her during the whole of the time that followed lunch and preceded dinner.

Nevertheless, it must not be supposed that the

afternoon dragged tediously with Geoffrey. Before him lay his two documents. But the one which had caused that quick outburst of passionate wrath on the part of Mrs. Kilvert engaged his deepest thought. He had taken it out of his pocket before now on this same day. In the church, and while the minister was commenting upon some passage from Holy Writ, the temptation had been too great; and, much as he knew his mother would have grieved at such an act, he had drawn out this certificate, and had become lost in the reflections it aroused. How extraordinary the circumstances which had brought him into acquaintance with these Kilverts! Not merely had they been the means of introducing him to Mrs. Grandperrot, who knew so much of that part of his family history which had been a blank to him, but partly through them, and partly through an accident, he had become participator of another secret that for the moment, at least, threw that one in which he was more immediately concerned into the background. It was not likely that Johnnie could win Cécile for his wife now. Nay, it was not probable that Johnnie would seek her, after learning his true position at the Grange. Still, her life must ever be associated with their lives, to the extent of the past; and it would be a happy circumstance that should make him the means of advancing her interests, even in a future to

which neither he nor Johnnie could belong. How strange and inscrutable! Johnnie cast down, Cécile exalted. The one humbled to the dust, the other lifted up to a height utterly beyond the other's reach; almost beyond his reach had he still been John Lexley, heir to Ralph Lexley, of the Grange, Lackington.

When the dinner-hour arrived, neither mother nor daughter was to be seen. It was announced that Mrs. Kilvert was worse, and that the doctor, although he had left her not more than forty minutes ago, had been recalled with urgency. The fever was wholly gone, but mortification had begun to supervene. So it was feared.

"Madame is in the sick-room. Mademoiselle was having dinner in her private apartment." So said the French waiter in answer to Geoffrey's queries. He had taken Mrs. Grandperrot's place, and sat facing the plethoric Frenchman.

The evening slowly passed away, and Geoffrey felt more and more uneasy. He had seen nothing of Louise since early morning, and he had exchanged but two or three words with her then. But this was not now uppermost in his mind. Mrs. Kilvert was rapidly growing worse. When the *soubrette* came in and whispered in a frightened manner that the doctor had given her up, he was utterly overcome. He had

made up his mind that she was to recover, and that he and she were to become reconciled; and that reconciliation was to pave the way for a better understanding on the subject of this certificate. She was to take him into her confidence, and he would move her heart to do the right. And now she was dying. He had never seen death in his life, although he had been near it. It was hard to disabuse himself of the feeling that she would rally and get better. Besides, he felt that he was, in a certain measure, the cause of her dying.

He felt a deep longing to see Mrs. Kilvert. Surely she must want to see him! He would not go to bed. He would sit up.

CHAPTER VIII.

"*Cym.* How ended she?
Cor. With horror, madly dying, like her life,
Which, being cruel to the world, concluded
More cruel to herself. What she confessed
I will report, so please you."
Cymbeline.

THERE came a tap at Geoffrey's door about twelve o'clock. Geoffrey himself was sitting in the dark by the window. He had been expecting that tap for hours.

"Mrs. Kilvert is anxious to see you, Mr. Lexley." It was Mrs. Grandperrot's voice.

"I am quite ready," responded Geoffrey, opening the door.

Led by the lady of the house, he ascended the staircase that conducted to the highest *étage*, saving that there were attics above. Then he followed close upon her heels along a long and narrow passage; a turn, and a second passage, and at the further door she stopped.

"You will see a great change in Mrs. Kilvert. Be prepared. Show no agitation."

They entered. There were two candles burning, one at either side of the bedstead. A priest was there, prepared to administer the last rites which his Church vouchsafes to the living. Mr. Kilvert sat by the foot of the couch—helpless, but sensible. The little doctor was beside him; and the nurse stood over the bed, on which was propped with pillows Mrs. Kilvert, in a half-sitting, half-reclining posture. She looked very quietly for a moment at Geoffrey; then a short spasm flitted across her pale face; then she seemed suddenly still.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Lexley. My friend, the good priest here, has impressed upon me the necessity of my making peace with all men before I partake of the sacrament. He has also urged me to a contrite confession of my past shortcomings, especially of any particular sin that may be secretly weighing upon my soul." She paused. "Miles, I think there is a God of Circumstance, after all."

"I'm sorry I contradicted you, Thérèse," he said, lifting his head, and speaking abjectly.

"Did you contradict me? I did not notice it. To think that this gentleman should meet us on the coach; that he should be one of the Lexleys; that we should be upon this particular errand; that we should agree to travel together; that he should come to London, and at my suggestion take up his abode

at Mrs. Grandperrots ; that he should visit a church, the same church, with a view of getting his father's marriage certificate, as my friend asserts, although he refused to tell me so himself ; that I should have preceded him on a similar quest ; that an incorrectly written copy thrown aside should attract Mr. Lexley's eye ; that he should be led thereby to look at the original entry ; that this secret should no longer be my own, just when it had become valuable to me! Yes, Miles, the good priest is right. There is—there must be—a God of Circumstance. I was wrong."

"You've bin a good wife—a bit harsh at times," whined her husband feebly.

"If my strength will hold out, I will furnish you, Mr. Lexley, with a few particulars which will enable you to unravel the details of that mystery upon which you have come thus suddenly. I did not intend to injure you in the street. I saw you with the certificate in your hand, and a wild passion seized me to snatch it from you. It was silly, because you could get another if that were destroyed. But passion is always silly and unreasonable. The accident is my own doing, and the meet reward of my folly."

"I cannot tell you how grieved I am," said Geoffrey in a low, earnest voice.

"Hold," she replied quickly. "I do not want your confessions. Listen to mine." A second spasm

twitched her features. Passion was not altogether at rest in her bosom. The nurse smoothed her face with her hand. Mrs. Kilvert became calm again. She asked for a cordial. It was given her.

"And now for details, for time presses; the goal is very near. I will not weary your ears with a biography. Rather I will recount to you the history of a particular epoch in my life. I may say that I was born in Paris, and carefully and well brought up. My father, Pierre Briccot, was a notary, and in a good position. I was sent to a good school, and considered to be highly accomplished. But I was spoiled. My mother died when I was yet a child, and my father lavished and concentrated all his tenderest affections upon me. I was all he had, and he withstood me in nothing. Every wish, every whim, every fanciful caprice, was gratified. My will uncurbed, my passions unrestrained, I grew up imperious and dictatorial. I was naturally of a jealous and revengeful disposition. So far nothing in the shape of a rival had stepped in to threaten my position, or withstand my humour. My passions grew unchafed. They became strengthened by non-exercise.

"But my father died, and died in poverty. It was found that he had saved nothing. He had in secret been a gamester; and, though none suspected it, he had lost all he had laid up. I was penniless.

"At this time I was about twenty-one, young, handsome. I was undoubtedly handsome then. Even Marie will own to that."

"You were the handsomest woman I knew when first we became acquainted," said Mrs. Grandperrot.

"I had had several eligible offers, but had refused them with disdain. I was ambitious, and looked for a higher station than they could give me. When my poverty was known none of them returned to me. There was, perhaps, one of them whom I might have accepted had he sought me a second time. Enough to say that he did not, and I had to look about me for something to keep me from destitution. For two years I was governess in an English family, and resided in London, in Seymour Street, then one of the most fashionable streets of the West End. But I was not comfortable; and they did not like me. They limited my movements to the schoolroom too much. My success as a teacher, however, made them anxious to keep me as long as was practicable.

"Almost the first person I met there was Lieutenant Grewby. He became exceedingly attentive to me, and I told him my position. He was very friendly and kind, and promised to see what his sister could do for me. The very next day I got a note asking me to call upon Miss Grewby. She was about thirty, somewhat plain-looking, and a great

invalid; indeed, she had been subject to fits from her childhood. She was under a celebrated physician, one who had a European celebrity for certain specific complaints, and it necessitated a prolonged residence in the capital.

"She told me that she found it necessary to have two attendants. The one who was with her now, Miss Haddock, was all that she could desire, but she was becoming quite worn with daily harassment and nights of watching. She was afraid that she should lose her if some scheme were not devised to lighten her labours. Miss Grewby added that she wanted companionship rather than attendance, and for that reason required a lady of taste and education for the place. The salary would be proportionately higher than an ordinary professional attendant would look for. Between two the work and hours would be light.

"I agreed to the proposal. I may as well furnish one reason out of several for so doing. Lieutenant Grewby had shown me particular attention. During the close of my stay with my employers his courtesies to me had become the subject of remark; and it was this, and the encouragement I was said—rightly or wrongly, matters little now—to have given him, which caused the final rupture of my engagement in the house. I thought—and I say it now with unim-

paired memory of all that preceded and followed my unfortunate entry into the Grewby family—I thought that I was the object of Mr. Grewby's sincere and devoted attachment. I believed that he intended to ask me to be his wife. I will add, too—Miles has heard me say it often ; and it is no fault of his that it was not my after character—that I might have become a soft and tender-hearted and sympathetic woman had he done so, and had we married. He, too, might have been living now."

Geoffrey saw that same sweet smile flit across her mouth which he had seen in the silver moonlight an evening or two ago.

"I speedily awoke to a consciousness that I had been fooling myself; and that the lieutenant, if he had ever thought of such a thing, had ceased to do so. That he was in love, but not with me, I discovered before I had been twenty-four hours in the house. He loved Miss Haddock. She was very pretty—only pretty ; but very pretty, and small, and neat. She had not my education, nor my manners ; but she was full of little tender ways, and nursed and tended Miss Grewby with a quiet and constant devotion, which I frankly confess was utterly beyond my comprehension. Miss Grewby was very fretful at times, and peevish, and irritable; and I was the same. Catharine Haddock never changed. I can look back

and recall the many times that she undertook my share of the work when her own was done. Time unclouds the past as well as hallows it. I see now in Miss Haddock a noble and unselfish nature, which I did not or would not see then.

"I did not or would not see it, even though the proof lay to hand. Mr. Grewby proposed to her, and she refused him. She loved him; nevertheless, she refused him. She would not forsake her post. She felt that Miss Grewby could not do without her. One or two facts I learned from her own lips afterwards. She offered to be his wife if he would take his sister into his confidence, and if that sister would give her consent. Then she could both be his wife and cherish the invalid. Nay, so willing to marry him was she—for she loved him—that she herself suggested that she could tend her charge more devotedly if she could feel that she was her sister indeed. In this she blinded herself, or love blinded her. Not even as her sister could she have surrendered herself more unselfishly than she did now as a mere companion.

"But the lieutenant was afraid to speak to Miss Grewby. He was heir to the Grewby estate; and consent was impossible. His sister would write instantly to his father, and Miss Haddock would be removed — so he urged. This argument had considerable effect upon her. She would not marry

him, but she did not ask him again to speak to his sister.

"All this time I hated Catharine Haddock with a hatred that was scarcely human. All the secretly pampered jealousy of my nature was aroused. There are mental monstrosities as well as physical. The former are not so easily discovered. Dwarfs are proverbially cunning. My abnormity was accompanied with a secretive tendency. Miss Haddock thought I loved her. She compelled my admiration, but this only intensified my hatred. I hated her even because she would not let me despise her. I hated her not merely because she was my competitor in Mr. Grewby's affections, but because she was my superior in all womanly qualities.

"She never knew this. She was open, confidential, and full of trust. Reserve was foreign to her nature. I believe she loved me dearly. To the end she treated me as she might have treated her nearest and dearest——"

Mrs. Kilvert paused. A look of pain crossed her face.

"You are in pain?" said Mrs. Grandperrot.

"Not of body. I am only thinking. Poor Kate!"

The invalid seemed lost for several minutes in reflection. She suddenly roused herself.

"My story is not finished. I had forgot—where

was I? Oh, I remember. Catherine would not marry Mr. Grewby. A few months after this the end came. Miss Grewby, always sickly, and suffering from a complication of diseases which baffled treatment, died. To the last Kate tended her with a martyr-like constancy. I dwell on this, for at the time it seemed but an excuse for venting my dislike. Her conduct was a reproach to me. I chose to resent it as such.

"The determination of Miss Haddock not to marry young Mr. Grewby was weakened when her mistress died. One night she confided to me, with many blushes, that her resolve was changed. She had promised to unite herself with Mr. Grewby. They were to be married in a few days—secretly, at one of the churches that lay near. Would I accompany her? Lieutenant Grewby had removed her objections to secrecy in the matter. He could not help himself, she said. Much family unhappiness would be avoided if she would forego for a time her proud position as acknowledged wife of the heir of Grewby.

"I consented. Well was it that this communication was made in the dark. Well was it that she herself was agitated; otherwise she might have read in my face the feelings which I refrained from showing by my lips. I had a sure conviction, formed on the instant, that such a connection as this, made in such a way, must inevitably lead to misery. Mr.

Grewby and his son were already at feud. The lieutenant had got into debt several times; and on each occasion that his father had set him solvent again, he had vowed that if his son could not live within the limits of his liberal allowance, he must look elsewhere for help. He would pay no more bills of his.

"They were married. The church you know. It was quite safe. Miss Grewby had never been able to attend a place of worship. The lieutenant had never done so, although able, unless led thither by Kate. But she always attended a chapel less distantly remote. Thus secrecy was easily preserved. I was there, and Miles, whom I then knew only as Lieutenant Grewby's groom and personal attendant.

"For a short interval they were happy. They had rooms in a small back street, out of Fenworthy Street, and went by the name of 'Marnott.' George Frederic—we always called him Frederic—seemed content to devote himself wholly to his wife. I settled down for a time at the Pension des Anglaise. The chamber I am lying in was mine. It was here I first encountered and became an acquaintance of Miss Passavant."

"Miss Passavant—Rachel?" asked Geoffrey, in deep agitation.

"No, her sister; she who afterwards became Mrs. Grandperrot. She is beside you."

"What! you are Johnnie's aunt?" cried the young man, turning to his hostess.

Mrs. Grandperrot laid his hand on his arm. "We will talk of this afterwards. Do not excite her," she added, in a whisper.

"You knew it?"

"Yes—but more hereafter."

"For a time, I say, they were happy," continued Mrs. Kilvert. "I often went to see her. Kate could talk about nothing but her husband and his kindness to her. She did not mind the concealment of her marriage so much as she had imagined she would. All would come right, no doubt. All this time she knew little or nothing of Frederic Grewby's outdoor life. He had, from the time of his arrival in London, fallen amongst evil associates. A Lieutenant Milton had especially taken him under his wing; the most popular, handsome, and good-for-nothing of idlings—a man not wholly vicious, but altogether unable to face right, when wrong in pleasant guise allured him otherwise. It was in his company that Frederic Grewby had lost so much money. Some Milton had borrowed from him—he had long run through his own patrimony—some he had won from him. A great part was given up at the gambling *salon* to Milton's associates.

"Of this Kate knew nothing. She had known

nothing of it before her marriage. Frederic had never introduced his friend to his sister. Most men will understand why. But Milton could not afford to let this newly-fledged Benedict escape. Not that he suspected a marriage. He never saw Grewby's new quarters, and conjectured nothing beyond a temporary *liaison*. But Frederic was necessary to him. A man whose father had on no less than three occasions cleared his son's liabilities, was as good as a blank cheque-book and a bank. Grewby could not be always with his wife. Milton met him, and his victim succumbed. He began to leave Kate Marnott, as we must call her, in the evenings. In the course of a few months she discovered that her husband was a spendthrift and a gambler. It was then my triumph began. It was I that informed her."

"Stop, Mrs. Kilvert," cried Geoffrey, impetuously.

"Silence, sir. You shall have all, or none. Know you not that I am bound to the good priest here to conceal nothing? I say, and I say it again, then began my triumph. How I watched her! At first she thought her love would win him back. And so it did for a few days; for I verily believe he never ceased to love her. But he had no moral stamina—no power to say 'No' to the beguiler. He could no more withstand Milton's baits than Miles could reject a glass of brandy at this very instant."

Poor Miles Kilvert! It is solemnly true that he lifted his head eagerly; and on his parched lip you could see, written as plain as words could speak, a desire that the experiment should be tried.

"By degrees Kate grew pale. Her strength waned, and her cheeks began to show here and there hollow places that had once been dimples. The delicate roundness of her face disappeared. Her fresh colour faded into wanness. Her eyes would often swell with unbidden tears. She busied herself in making little garments for the expected stranger. Her one hope lay here. The child might win to home and virtue, although the wife had failed. 'His baby will restore him—will it not be so, Thérèse?' she would ask. I answered according to her wish."

Geoffrey writhed. Did Cecilé, did Mr. Haddock, know all this? he wondered.

"In the mean time Frederic Grewby fell into still lower depths. He was again encumbered with debts, and was without the means of clearing them. His father had refused, absolutely and finally, to replenish him further than the limits of his allowance. He had also and more angrily denied the request that he would anticipate the day when that allowance should become due. Starvation, nothing less, seemed to stare them in the face. A portion of Kate's savings still remained, but it was a very little. She had been

helping her only brother at college for several years, and this had prevented her laying by much.

"One morning I was at her house. She was telling me of this new trouble. I do not think I ever saw such a sad face. Despair was legible in every feature. She was too weak to sit. She lay with half-closed eyes on a small couch.

"As we talked, Frederic came rushing in, breathless and wild-looking. 'Our secret is discovered, Kate. We are ruined!' 'How, Fred?' she said. 'I have just seen young Lexley in the vestry of the church. I happened to be passing, and saw him go in. I went on for a little distance, and then a feeling of apprehension seized me. We have not seen one another for some time. A coolness has sprung up. I suppose I am not good enough for his company,' he added bitterly. 'I went into the vestry and looked over his shoulder. His hand was on the very page. I could see my name at the top. He looked frightened when he saw me. "Your curiosity is rewarded with success," I said. "I have found what I came for, certainly," he replied. But that was all. He was quite overcome at being caught. Guilt was in his eye. I know Lexley. He will use this knowledge. Why else was he searching for it? It is all over.'"

Mrs. Grandperrot whispered in Geoffrey's ear,

"Your father had gone for a certificate of his marriage—the first had been mislaid and lost. He was wont to carry it with him everywhere to show, if need be, to his friends at home, I suppose."

"He turned to me suddenly. 'You have told him, Thérèse.' 'I have seen him occasionally, of late,' I said. 'He often comes to the Pension; but he knows nothing from me.' 'It matters not. My father will know, and we are ruined!' His face worked convulsively. 'There is one chance left, Kate. I will see a fellow I know. Cheer up; you shall have fifty pounds before night.' He seized his hat. 'Frederic,' his wife cried feebly. 'Yes.' 'You won't do anything dishon —— wrong. We can face poverty — but not disgrace. I don't mind poverty a bit,' she said in a cheery tone. 'I'll be very careful, Kitty,' he replied. But his eye was wild.

"We never saw him again alive. It appears that he went straight to a then well-known place of public resort; that he seized the cards, invited a game, played high, and lost a large sum. He promised to pay on the morrow, and left the chamber. In his hopelessness and desperation he shot himself—shot himself through the head, in the passage, close to the outer door. He must have premeditated this deed, for he had bought a pistol on his way to the gambling *salon*. That I discovered afterwards.

"It was found impossible to keep the intelligence from Kate. She demanded the truth. She lay on her couch, without moving. In the middle of the night the doctor was sent for. A premature confinement seemed imminent. The child, a little girl, was born; and in three hours after Kate was dead also.

"The body of Frederic Grewby lay at the place where he had committed his rash deed. Thither Mr. Grewby, and his second now his eldest son, came, and carried him back to Lackington. He was buried in the family vault. They knew nothing, of course, of the mother or child. I was the only one, besides Miles, who was aware of the marriage, and I had my reasons for maintaining the secret. A story got out that he had quarrelled in the open street with young Lexley, and that had impelled him to his suicide. This reached Lackington, I believe; for Mr. Curling mentioned it to me, when I saw him the first time at Newsham."

"And what did you do with the child—with Cécile?" asked Geoffrey, with emotion.

"I waited several days, buried Kate, and then wrote to her brother at Oxford. I spoke of his sister as Mrs. Marnott. I announced the marriage and death of both sister and brother-in-law, without entering into too many particulars; said that, after

the sale of all effects, and payment of outstanding accounts, there was about ten pounds, and begged to forward the sum. They had no other friends in London, and I was acting entirely from sympathetic motives. I should have written earlier had I discovered his existence earlier; but it was not till I had opened and read Kate's correspondence that I had learnt she had a brother living. I added that I would take charge of the baby till he could conveniently come over and claim her himself. He wrote back a sorrowful letter. The note had come just as he was going in for his final examination; and, with the agitation caused thereby, he had utterly failed in his papers. He had been expected to take a first class—a third was all he could hope for. He would come up to town, and be with me as soon as practicable.

"He came—a thin, delicate-looking youth, and utterly overwhelmed with his accumulation of troubles.

"I related to him further particulars about Mr. and Mrs. Marnott's death. And it was agreed that I should take charge of the child for the present. Haddock had no means of his own, but was to be ordained in a few weeks to a curacy of seventy pounds a year. He would then see what could be done. I seized my chance. I persuaded him to make over Cécile to me,

for a term of years. He was to contribute a small sum annually to her maintenance.

"Mr. Haddock was curate of Glapton about six years. At the close of this time a new district was formed out of Lackington parish, which was fast becoming overgrown with the spread of manufactories and mills. The curate of Glapton applied for it, and wrote to Mr. Grewby, reminding him that he was brother of Miss Grewby's faithful attendant. This at once secured for him the incumbency. A year or two afterwards he married; and then Cécile, whom he had visited twice, during an interval of eight years, was returned to him. She has lived with him ever since, except when at school.

"I may add that Lieutenant Milton had gone with his regiment to India, several weeks previous to the death of young Grewby.

"I married Miles. He knows why. I could not afford to let him be at large with such a secret."

"Will you tell me one thing, Mrs. Kilvert?" Geoffrey asked.

"What is it?" The sick one's voice had sunk to a whisper. She was much spent with the narration of so long a story.

"Why did you not allow Cécile to have her own?"

A curious look stole over the invalid's face. "There

were two reasons why I hid all these matters from her who was most nearly interested in them. One was this. So long as Cécile was kept out of her own, my malicious heart was satisfied. I was revenging myself upon Kate's child my hatred and jealousy of Kate herself. The child lay wholly in my power. For years she was living in a state of poverty, while a word from me could have set her up in highest state and affluence. I could look upon her day by day, and say whisperingly to myself, 'A single sentence, and you would be lifted out of this squalor and dirt, and established upon a height from whose eminence you could smile at the troubles and exigencies of a penurious estate. That sentence shall not be spoken. You are Kate's child!' It was this feeling that made it part of my happiness to have her under my own eye—to keep her by me. It was this caused me to plead with Mr. Haddock to let her stay so much longer with me than had been originally stipulated. I fed my revengful eyes upon her. Nevertheless, I did not neglect her. I taught her carefully; and she had made great progress, for a mere child, when she went to her uncle. I saw her but a few days ago, and I could see that she all but recognized me, changed as I am."

"And the other reason?"

"That was simply pecuniary. I knew that the

present Mr. Grewby, being then a young man, might marry. If children were born, my secret would be practically valueless. On the other hand, it was possible he might not marry—then my secret would be precious indeed. My determination was to wait and watch events.

"From young Mr. Haddock nothing was to be expected. He was a man of too deep integrity. He would neither buy nor sell a secret. Latterly my intention was to keep silence till Mr. Grewby should die; for then I knew I should be almost certain to obtain a high price from his successor—a second-cousin—on condition that the secret was to remain one for ever.

"Thus we have been watching events quietly at a distance. Miles succeeded his father on a farm at Newsham. It was thence he had gone to the stables at Grewby Park. We have lived there ever since. Once or twice only I have gone into Lackington. I purposely avoided the Haddocks and Lexleys. I wished all memories of London to fall into abeyance. The register was still there. The secret could not be considered safe.

"There is one little matter more. I have a letter written by Frederic Grewby after he left his wife on that fatal morning. It is addressed to his brother, and, after admitting his marriage, entrusts Catharine

and her child to his careful keeping. He adds that he feels assured his brother will do the right by them. The letter was left in the room below. I have kept it ever since. You will find it, Marie, at the bottom of my leather dressing-bag. Give it to Mr. Lexley."

Mrs. Kilvert fell back utterly exhausted. Nevertheless, she seemed pleased that she had been able to say everything that she had wished to divulge.

CHAPTER IX.

"Let us from point to point this story know,
To make the even truth in pleasure flow."
All's Well that Ends Well.

MRS. KILVERT lingered on till the afternoon of the following day, and then she died.

Not till after this did Geoffrey learn all he wished to know from Mrs. Grandperrot.

It was the next morning that he and she met in the breakfast-room. Neither of them had been to bed—that is, neither had undressed. Geoffrey had sat waiting to hear that life had ebbed out. Mrs. Grandperrot had watched by the dying bed, doing her best to make death easy so far as its physical conditions were concerned. Nor was this all. She had read to her many a passage of Holy Writ—for the priest was gone and the doctor, and only herself and the nurse were left.

It cannot be wondered at that she, even more than Geoffrey Lexley, looked haggard and ill.

"Most of the particulars were known to me, but

I did not know Cécile's parentage on the father's side. That was a surprise—not so much to me probably as you—for I don't know much about the Grewbys. Indeed, I can only recall the name, and that is all. I remember that a Miss Grewby lived for a time in apartments, not far from here; that she was an invalid, and that Mrs. Marnott—that name is still most familiar to me—had nursed her very tenderly until she died."

"Was last night's narration your first account?"

"Not wholly. Within a few hours after Mrs. Kilvert discovered who you were, she told me a portion of the story. She seemed to have a presentiment that you were to overthrow her plans."

"It is all very strange—that part of it," said Geoffrey, wonderingly.

"Strange, indeed. Strange, too, that you should be brought here."

"I cannot get over that other disclosure. You are Johnnie's aunt. Tell me something about my father?"

"Not now. My story is somewhat long, and complicated also. You do not want another immediately."

"It concerns me more nearly than the other."

"It is a sad one. Not so sad as Thérèse Kilvert's, however."

"I know it is sad. I should not have been here had it been otherwise. Still you will tell it me, won't you?"

"Later on. I must go back to Thérèse."

"When will you tell it me."

"When I have done with her." Solemnity fell on them both. Death could not be far off.

"Forgive me, I am very selfish," the young man murmured with a quivering lip.

The end came, and that evening Mrs. Grandperrot took her nephew, if we may so call him, into her private sitting-room. "I will tell you my story now. You have heard one; listen to the other. I and my sister were the only children of our parents. My father, Doctor Passavant, lived in this same street on the first floor of this same building. He was a Roman Catholic—rigid and strict. My mother was a Protestant. It seems there had been an arrangement between her parents and my father, that if there should be any children by the marriage, the second should be given over to her mother's friends to be trained up in the Reformed religion. The eldest was to be brought up in her father's creed. It was stipulated, too, that Mrs. Passavant should be at liberty to attend her own place of worship.

"Thus it befell that I seldom lived at home during my childhood. I was not far off, and my mother and

I constantly interchanged visits. Nevertheless, I passed my youth with my mother's relatives.

"Rachel was considered pretty, but hers was a very unordinary type of prettiness. Every line of her face was pensive; every look was a thought. Unlike most other girls she was plainest when radiant or smiling. When her features wore their natural expression of deep and tender absorption, she won a regard which had in it a something of reverence. Why, none could tell. She was peculiarly reclusive, and was happiest when alone or in the company of her father. Especially was she happy when she might be allowed to sit in one of the benches of the Catholic chapel and ponder rather than pray. Here she would linger till some one fetched her. She would watch the white-robed choristers, and listen to their chauntings with silent ecstasy. She would follow the priests in their daily offices with a rapt devotion, as if she herself underwent daily consecration.

"There was a mysterious loneliness about her. It hung over her like a hazy cloud. Even at meal times she seemed to be shut off by some invisible barrier from the rest. She never played with other children; or when she did, it was unlike other children. A sad, rather than gloomy, religiousness characterized all she said and did. She loved reading much; but it was only such books as elderly

people would chose, and only a class of them. The stories of the saints, the biographies of secluded lives, such as cloistered monks and wimpled nuns had led, who had fled admixture with the world, and vowed chaste thoughts and the purity of silent intercourse with God, these fascinated her so, that her life became, insensibly to herself, a shadowing forth of theirs. She knew nought of their failures. She trod in the footsteps of the crowd as if in a sanctuary. With the multitude, she nevertheless dwelt apart. At all hours she seemed to be keeping holy-day.

"She did not outgrow these characteristics. They grew with her growth. But as she approached her woman's estate they made her wondrously beautiful; in her life, as in herself. A soft light dwelt in her eye. She was full of quiet kindnesses for those with whom, nevertheless, she did not associate. She came to them with sweet charities in her hand as a stranger visitant—like a stray angel whom one never hopes to see again. The poor blessed her as we bless ministering but unseen spirits. They watched her forth from their dwellings as if they thought to have seen her float into the air and fade out in the deep blue of the skies, rather than softly wind her way round the street corner, and thus home. She was a thing of gentlest extraction.

"It was strange how she avoided men. She did

not understand their hard ways, nor secular lives, nor their worldly behaviour, however honest and of good report. In the atmosphere of men she was as a delicate flower transplanted into a rough pathway, around whom are nought but hard stones, and gravel, on which the dew never falls, or never seems to fall. That the rough are ofttimes the most impressible, and the strongest the tenderest, she did not know. How should she?—she mingled not with them. To her the race of men were dead—they had vanished with the saints and holy men of old. These, saving her father, were a new creation—these beings she saw about her that swept themselves along in the tumultuous tide of earthly concern, and selfish supremacy. The holy, heroic age was past. How gentle a man might be she had no divination, till—till one day—and Ralph Lexley came.

"I do not know your father now. I can only describe him as he was when he saw Rachel, and when he appeared to her as a new procession from the womb of the universe.

"He was tall, and pale, and overgrown. He had been sent to travel and gain strength. He was like a single lily with a long stem—proud yet shy, ardent yet wondrously reserved, impassive to the unpenetrating, but full of the deepest and most glowing sensibilities to them that cared or had skill to touch them into

being. This care and skill had Rachel. He took up his abode in this pension—it was not then ours—and they met, perforce. Together they quickly took acquaintance of that world which only they two seemed to recognize, or whose language they alone could speak. They were a pair.

"They would sit and talk, or be silent together by the hour. And thus the days fled onwards. Ralph Lexley was to have gone on to one of the southern watering-places, but he did not. No one thought to ask him why? He was gaining strength rapidly, he would sometimes say; and that was tacitly assumed to be the reason of his delay. I believe at that time I was the only one who read things differently, except, perhaps, my mother. But she had grown wondrously fond of the English visitor in the pension above.

"It was not till they found they loved, and had pledged their troth one to the other, that their difficulties began. Ralph was a Protestant, with all the ardent affection for Protestantism which is part of the Englishman's birthright. From a child he had been trained to hate the intolerant, cruel Church of Rome. From his earliest infancy his mind had been educated to connect that system with dogma that was false, and acts that were brutal. While Rachel had been reading the biographies of the Romish saints, he

had been poring over the calendar of the English martyrs. The Bible, Bunyan, and Foxe—these had been his books in the nursery, and long afterwards. And as he had grown up he had learnt to glorify the Reformation as the brightest era of England's history. What Magna Charta was to secular, the Reformation was to religious, liberty. He knew the Church's wars abroad, too. St. Bartholomew's Eve to Rachel was a sad, inexplicable story; she had never unravelled it, and never tried. Ralph knew it by heart, and could expound its causes, and measure its issues. He was a terrible Protestant. He firmly believed that Latimer's and Ridley's days, and St. Bartholomew's Eve, were to come again. To say that we were becoming more civilized, if not more religious, was to throw dust into people's eyes. Mr. Juggins, his minister, a young and ardent preacher, had declared it with prophetic inspiration and apostolic zeal. His father had shortly before left the Established Church, and joined the pastor's chapel, because the clergyman would not declaim and declare similar things.

"Rachel could not marry a Protestant—that was out of the question. Her father was utterly adverse to the marriage at all. He did not like his daughter to wed a Protestant, even if he abjured his errors, and entered the fold of the true Church. But Rachel's weapon was a powerful one, and she

wielded it bravely. Her father had married a strict Protestant.

"Shall I go on to tell you how passion at length prevailed over reason and conscience? Your father roamed about like a wild man. Not merely was the marriage forbidden, unless the ceremony was performed at the Romish altar; but he must first abjure his errors, and be formally received as a penitent into the embraces of the Church. On these terms he might marry; otherwise he must see and talk with Rachel no more. Dr. Passavant was inexorable, and he was backed up by the priests. Your father left London in the night, and went on his tour; visited Oxford, and was intending to go on to Bath. But he did not. As suddenly as he had vanished he appeared again. His eyes were wild and bloodshot. He demanded to see my father, and promised all he stipulated, if it might be done at once.

"My father saw the priests of his Church. Everything was quickly arranged. The next day Ralph publicly abjured the faith of his fathers, and on the day that followed that he was married to Rachel."

"At the Romish church?" Geoffrey nearly fell. He clutched the table with both his hands.

"Yes—you knew that?"

"Never. There is nothing said of it at the English church."

"I will tell you why, shortly."

"But stop, Mrs. Grandperrot. Do you mean to say that Johnny was born after the marriage of his parents?"

Mrs. Grandperrot stared at the young man in angry bewilderment. "Your father has not dared to insinuate to the contrary?"

"Oh no, I believe not. But I do not understand. There have been strange, sad reports. Oh, Mrs. Grandperrot, it is quite true, is it not? Say it is quite true."

"It is quite true, Mr. Lexley," she replied, with a high colour and angry tone.

Geoffrey seized her hands and wrung them. Then he got up and walked, or rather danced, round the room. Then he seized his hat, and seemed about to rush out of the apartment. Then he turned back, and began to sing the snatch of a cricket song, with a "roll-tiddy-roll" at the end. Then he laughed; then he cried; then he laughed till the tears came down his cheeks, so that you could not tell whether he was laughing or crying. Mrs. Grandperrot thought he had gone mad. He finished by seizing her round the waist, and kissing her, and then she was assured of the fact.

"Where is the church—and the register?" he asked, when he had grown a shade calmer.

"I will take you this afternoon. I have to see the priest about Thérèse's funeral." Geoffrey looked ashamed.

"I had forgotten," he said. "I will be quiet if you will finish the story." But it required great self-suppression to listen.

"The saddest part is to come," she added, and her tone was very sad. "The marriage brought nothing but misery to both. No sooner was the act done, than your father repented of it. My sister, too, was conscience-stricken. She had persuaded her husband to perjure himself, and forswear his heart's obligations. He had abjured his faith, and yet he believed in it as much as ever. I do not know which was the most wretched. Surely never were wedded pair so abjectly miserable. They lived at first in the pension, but afterwards took apartments in a neighbouring street.

"Your father's one fear was lest the story should reach his father and grandfather.

"He returned home for some months. Then he came back again, and stayed the winter. His father had given him an allowance, as his health had been very bad at Lackington ; and he was to wander about, and do as he liked, provided he came back better and stronger—so his father had said in a cheery manner, for he had noticed his son's haggard face.

"But things did not mend. The child was born, and christened John. There had been a dreadful scene between my father and yours before it was taken to the Romish baptistery; and afterwards they did not meet if they could avoid one another. Dr. Passavant had thrown the blame of his daughter's misery on his son-in-law. And this in a measure was true. Mr. Lexley had done a most heinous thing. I had done my utmost to dissuade him from the act which was the precursor of his marriage. Passion, however, prevailed. The worst came. Your father became morose and irritable. He never went out; but brooded in the presence of his wife by the fire. Then he would leave her and return home; and then after a while come back again. My sister bore up for a time. At last she offered to be re-married at a Protestant place of worship, provided Ralph would keep it secret from the priest and her father. He was pleased, and for the second time they pledged their public troth. I was privy to it, and was present.

"It was only for a day or two that Ralph Lexley was happy. His heart's belief was still abjured. He would sit sullenly for hours without addressing a word to Rachel. Its effect upon her he never knew till it was too late. He had promised to take her on a visit to his home, and to introduce her to his parents. But the doctors forbade. I say doctors, for

in the mean time my father had died. He went alone; and when he returned, he saw that she was dying.

"Then he cherished her tenderly. He forgot his perjury, and his wretchedness, in this deeper agony of coming separation. She passed away in his arms, and those few brief days were the happiest of their wedded life. But it was years before I forgave him. I took care of his child, as Rachel with her latest breath had requested; and it was not, I believe, till after his grandfather lay in his grave that Johnnie went to his father's home.

"This was all a long time ago. It seems like unclasping a book that has been lost—once familiar, now forgotten. I have seldom heard of your father. I was myself married soon afterwards to Mr. Grandperrot, the son of the keeper of this pension. My father—he was of a good family—died, without having saved more than a pittance. This, however, he bequeathed solely to me. I was quite willing to share it with my nephew, but Ralph said he would be amply provided for."

"Ay, ay," responded Geoffrey, with a twinkle in his eye. "Amply indeed! He's heir to Lexley Grange. Hurrah!"

Then he told his tale; and the little woman was very sympathetic, and was much drawn to Geoffrey for the unselfishness which shone, though he knew it

not, through the simplicity of his narration; and in the end she became guilty of that indiscretion for being guilty of which Geoffrey had met with silent reproof. She threw her arm round his neck and kissed him.

"I must see Johnnie some day. I hope he is half as—but, there—no compliments. And besides——" And their voices again grew hushed. There was death in the house.

CHAPTER X.

"Am I not consanguineous, am I not of her blood?"
Twelfth Night.

"AND how is my cousin Louise?" said Geoffrey, gaily advancing to meet that young lady as she shyly entered the room while he and Mrs. Grandperrot were still conversing over these strange disclosures.

"Has mamma told you?" she asked, laughing and blushing as he seized her hand.

"Yes, and many other things besides; some almost as nice——" Mrs. Grandperrot was not allowed to hear the concluding declaration.

"I am glad you know. I could scarcely believe it when mamma told me on Saturday night."

"You did not like the relationship, I fear," he said, with a reproachful glance out of his brown eyes. He wished to remind her that she had avoided him ever since that same evening. "I thought you were to take me to church yesterday?"

Louise looked confused. "It was not that. Mamma had not quite made up her mind whether to tell you or not. I think she was afraid I should reveal the secret." This was an intimation delicately hinted that it was not her fault that she had held aloof for the last day and a half. Lovers are quick. It was not lost upon Geoffrey.

"The explanation having been vouchsafed by your mother, I shall expect you to be doubly gracious this evening—my last evening—just to prove that your unkindness was not voluntary."

Mrs. Grandperrot had gone out of the room.

"You are not going so soon, are you?" Louise seemed unfeignedly sorry.

"I must go at once. Business of the utmost consequence demands I should return home immediately. I would go to-night if it were possible; but I have to get a register made out, and it is not likely to reach me before morning. Mr. Briggs will be able to claim your undivided attention."

"I shall keep out of his way; he is rude—and—and I hate him." Louise was pouting, and looked very pretty.

"When shall I come back?" he said, in a somewhat supplicatory tone.

"You are coming back, then?" Louise's eye brightened.

"I was asking you. It will depend on you whether we ever meet again, dear Louise."

Mrs. Grandperrot came in at this juncture. "Dinner is ready, love, and you have not taken your things off. Be quick. Mr. Michelot does not like being kept waiting."

What a different dinner from yesterday's! The Birmingham people were there, and the Briggses, and the plethoric Frenchman, and, of course, Louise, and Geoffrey, and Mrs. Grandperrot—only the Kilverts were not there. One of them lay dead upstairs.

Still, people must eat to live, even though some live to eat—the Frenchman, at the other end of the table, for instance—not to say Mr. Briggs, senior, of Brixton, by-and-by to become Briggston. Louise came in late, and the only vacant seat was by the lieutenant. He was very attentive. How quickly do offences come to the enamoured! Geoffrey tried his utmost to feel and look aggrieved. Louise would keep out of young Briggs's way, forsooth. She thought him rude. She hated him. And yet, on this, their last night, she is seated by the enemy, and listening to all he says in a manner, if not gracious, at least complaisant! He met her glance with a look of scorn. After that, and until the end of the dinner, he tried to assume an ignorance of her presence.

Geoffrey Lexley, thou art an unconscionable ass!

Nevertheless, reader, thou mayest perchance remember a day and an hour when thou, too, didst develop similar asinine proclivities.

Just as the ladies were getting up from the table, one of the waiters gave Mrs. Grandperrot a large sealed packet. "It is the certificate," she whispered to Geoffrey.

"Then I can catch the night mail."

"What is it, mamma?" said Louise, coming up and putting her arm in her mother's.

"Only Mr. Lexley's"—she corrected herself, laughingly—"Geoffrey's register."

"I shall be able to leave this evening," he said, not looking at Louise.

"Men's business always seems so urgent."

"This is. I wonder if I have time to run out and buy a rug. It is very cold travelling by night, I find."

"It will be a risk," said Mrs. Grandperrot. "Besides, the shops will be closed. I will lend you mine. Have you a wrapper?"

"No," said Geoffrey.

"I can lend Mr.—Geoffrey, my woollen comforter which I knitted last winter, the crimson one," suggested Louise to her mother. She looked as if tears were very near the margin of her eyes. She did not like to think that Geoffrey should go in irritation. If he

only knew how she hated that Lieutenant Briggs. She wished she might tell him.

Everything was in readiness. Geoffrey's little bag was at the door ; the rug lay beside it. Mrs. Grandperrot was in the *salle à manger,* tying up the half of a chicken and some bread and salt in brown paper. Louise was in her mother's private room, the room in which the story had been told in the afternoon. She had not gone down to the second *étage ;* nor had she given the woollen wrapper to Geoffrey. She held it in her hand, but when she heard Geoffrey's footstep on the stair she laid it on the table.

"Good-bye, Louise."

"Good-bye." He held her hand. She had intended to say that she hoped he would have a pleasant journey, but somehow the words would not come.

"Is this the comforter?" he said, stretching out his left hand. He still held hers with his right. She did not take it away. She was very glad to let it rest there. It was so dark he couldn't see how glad she was—so it didn't matter, she thought.

"I will bring the wrapper back again."

"We shall be glad to see you, mamma and I."

"Do you like me? Say you do, just a little, Louise." He was a foot nearer.

"I—I hate him. I couldn't help having to sit by

him. I will always be in time for dinner, and sit by mamma——"

"Till I am here again." He was close to her. She did not reply. She was not sure that she ought to have said what she had said.

"My darling, I feel as if I could not ask you to be my wife now. I must give my news at home first. But I will ask you when I return. What shall you say?"

Then they both laughed. It was so sweet and droll. Then he kissed her, once, twice, then once again, and then he rushed out.

In another minute he had bid good-bye to his aunt, and had vanished down the street.

CHAPTER XI.

"Believe me, I do not believe thee."
King John.

A FEW minutes after Geoffrey left the Grange, in the silence of that awful night there had been heard by him a piercing shriek. Others had heard it besides him; far less faintly, too. It came from Mrs. Lexley's bedroom. The whole house was aroused. Servants appeared on the landing, trembling and frightened. Johnnie, too, roused from a happy dream, awoke to the consciousness that something exceedingly terrible had happened.

He hastily put on part of his dress, and sped to his father's room, and entered.

"Is that you, Geoffrey? Fetch Dr. Garfitt. Your father is ill—very ill."

"Can I help you first, mother?" cried Johnnie, springing forward. It was quite dark.

"Oh, it is you, Johnnie. Tell Geoffrey to go; he runs faster than you. Then come back yourself."

There was a moan, a helpless, gurgling, suffocating kind of moan from the bed.

"Where is Gipsy, mother?"

"In your room, isn't he?"

"No."

"Perhaps he has gone already, bless him!"

"I'll make sure."

The candle was soon lighted, and as there was no male indoor servant at the Grange, Johnnie determined to run himself for the doctor. He was not many minutes in going and returning. He would not wait for Dr. Garfitt. Having given a clear message, he sped back again. He wondered that he had not seen Gip.

Dr. Garfitt came, and was quickly ushered into the room. The moment he saw Mr. Lexley he shook his head. "This is serious," he whispered. "A stroke——"

A cry of pain went forth from the wife. It was the only cry she uttered that night. Henceforward she was calm, collected, and quiet. Neither she, nor the doctor, nor Johnnie left the bedside of the sick one till morning. Only once the latter was sent with some written directions to Dr. Garfitt's house. He was getting old, and had an assistant.

The assistant came as quickly as might be, and the two in whispered colloquy applied themselves to their work.

When morning was come, the extent of injury was known.

The right side was wholly paralyzed, including the right arm. Mr. Lexley was still unconscious.

"Where is Geoffrey?" said the doctor suddenly.

The mother and son stared at one another.

"We thought he had run for you," said Mrs. Lexley, with a look of alarm.

"He never came to bed, mother."

"I saw him go. He said 'Good-night' to me at the foot of the staircase."

"He must have gone out again. His bed is undisturbed."

Again Johnnie and Jane Lexley stared in bewilderment each at the other. What could it mean? Where was Geoffrey gone to? Why had he gone? These questions were not asked aloud. Each saw them in the other's eye.

"We must not harass ourselves, Johnnie. He will come shortly, and explain himself. One object claims our attention at present."

Neverthless, the morning went slowly by, and the noon, and then the afternoon; and when the evening began to prevail the two looked at one another with sore-sick glances. They did not speak. The question "Where is he?" now stood out with tenfold increased terror—so terrible, that they did not dare

to utter it. They were afraid to frighten one another.

Mr. Juggins had called in the middle of the morning. Ralph Lexley could not be seen then. He came again after tea. Jane would not leave the invalid, but Johnnie went downstairs, and saw him in the breakfast-room.

"This is grievous news, Johnnie."

"Where is he?"

"I say this is grievous news, this illness of your father."

"Terrible! But where is Gipsy?"

"Gipsy—Geoffrey—is he not here? Has he not been home since the meeting—since last night?"

"No. What meeting?"

Mr. Juggins looked with sad earnestness at the young man. Evidently as yet he knew nothing of this other, and even greater, trouble. But where was Geoffrey? Surely—and the minister's eye flashed fire—Ebenezer Emlott had not waylaid him, and done him bodily harm? The next moment he spurned the idea. The deacon had proved himself a base and despicable man, but he would not dare to do this. He had not sunk down deep enough to meditate such a revenge as this would betoken. No; there was already another thought in the minister's mind. The lad had run away from home. His high

spirit could not brook the disclosure that was to come. He would not confront his parent's remorse; he dare not face his mother's agony; he could not bear his brother's humiliation. The lad had fled from home.

The aged pastor groaned in spirit. What an accumulation of troubles! And all hinging upon one wrongful deed. He did not doubt that Ralph Lexley's illness was in some way the immediate result of this sad affair. Perhaps he knew that this meeting was to be held; and knew also what his brother-in-law intended to propose. Perhaps it was he that had told Geoffrey, and hence Geoffrey's coming in the middle of these consultations. How bitterly was sin punished, even in this present world!

"You have something to tell us. Let us know all at once. We are prepared for sorrow," cried Johnnie, with an unnatural calmness.

"I have something to tell you; but not just now."

"But Gip—where's Gip?"

"Geoffrey, I doubt not, is safe; and I know why he is not here. You shall know all. The first matter of importance is this. I must see your father the moment he is conscious. I have something to tell him which will do him more good, I verily believe, than all the medicines that earthly physician can apply.

"You will come upstairs?" entreated Johnnie.

"Yes. Let us go at once."

The minister took Jane's hand in both his own, and gently pressed it; but said nothing. He then looked upon the face of his friend as he lay there upon the bed. Ralph's face was partly discoloured. It seemed as if he had been bleeding at the nostrils. His eye was filmy and dull; his breathing stertorous. The pastor knelt down, and Jane and Johnnie knelt with him. No prayer was uttered aloud. Each prayed his and her own prayer. It was the same pleading—life, life, life! We all know what we want with wonderful distinctness on these occasions.

In the silence of his heart, the pastor was praying also that this great sin might be forgiven Ralph Lexley. Silently he could particularize, aloud he dared not, for as yet mother and son knew nothing.

"I will come again to-morrow, Jane. Meantime, be not uneasy about Geoffrey. I do not know whither he is gone, but I know why he is gone; and this I can say, he is not on the path of evil. You will bless his intention some day, if not his act."

"More mysteries! How long must I continue to grope in the dark? Do not delay the dawn, friend!"

"It will usher in some increase of sorrow, Jane." He was sad and sympathetic.

"Let it come. This waiting for day is killing me. Will the night soon pass?"

"It shall pass now. Come, Johnnie. Come, Jane." He led them both into the window recess. He was glad they were in the sick room. They would be under compulsion not to give way to open demonstration of their grief. He could tell the story under his breath so much easier than in a tone of ordinary converse. He felt as if he could whisper it out of half its terrible reality. Besides, the sinner lay at hand, helpless, strengthless, stricken down. Their hearts would warm the quicker toward the transgressor, the cause of all this pain.

The candle remained by the bed-head. It flickered upon the invalid. Jane could sit, and listen, and yet watch his face; so that if any change occurred in his breathing, or his eye, she could be with him immediately again.

And there, with Jane's hand in his—for the good man had known her as a little girl, and seen her grow up—there, on that same night that saw Geoffrey upon the coach, and passing through scented hedgerows and sylvan shades—there, under the window, while pale stars looked down, and reflected back the pallor of their cheeks, he told them that which they had a right to know; that which those who vouched for its truth had better have let them know before.

I scarcely think the reader will do otherwise than shrink from that brief relation, as it was delivered. I think he will feel that there should be no prying ears nor eyes about those three. There is a sanctity in some sorrow that warns off the approach even of sympathy. There is mourning where pity would be an impertinence.

He began the story. He spoke of London and Johnnie's mother.

Jane listened, and watched her husband's face.

The pastor went on with his narration. He spoke of Johnnie himself; of the father's deep fondness for his boy.

The wife still kept her eye on Ralph Lexley.

He spoke—oh, how gently!—of the sin. It was told almost in the simple Saxon of Scripture. Again he spoke of the child; how he had been brought to Lackington—to the Grange; how the sin had been hid, that he might not lose his boy.

Mrs. Lexley never removed her glance from the bed.

He spoke next of Ralph Lexley's second marriage; his loneliness, his desire for some one to love, to cherish, and to teach his child. She, too, had children in due course. Then complications began, and the father began to drift into difficult and delicate relations with his own offspring. As his perplexity

increased he had become more sensitive, and solitary in his life. At last the secret had got out, and become bruited about.

The watcher ceased not. Was she taking a divination from her husband's face?

"That he is sorry for his sin, the proof lies there. See him. Is he not stricken low enough?"

"I do not believe it," said Jane quietly. Well was it that they were in the sick chamber. Perhaps the feeling that surged at her heart would not then have been so pent up.

"I do not comprehend."

"My husband never committed this sin you speak of."

"Geoffrey learnt it, and has gone."

"Geoffrey has been misled into believing a falsehood."

Johnnie had said nothing. His eye had been fastened on the stars. He had never taken his eye from them. He fell back into the corner of the recess, crouching low, and gave vent to a low moan. It was as the cry of an animal in pain—that helpless, saddest of cries. No one spoke for several minutes. Each in turn was revolving the past. How every incident of bygone years seemed to fit and tally with this new and awful discovery! The endless little mysteries of their daily life; the numberless peculiarities of the father;

his seclusion; his reticence; his conduct to Johnnie—everything, everything pointed to the fact that this narrative was true.

"Nevertheless, I do not believe it," said Jane, after a prolonged silence.

Johnnie crept nearer to his mother. He felt for her hand, and began to caress it in a piteous, entreative manner. It was as if he were a little helpless, blind babe, and was feeling instinctively rather than intelligently for protection.

His hand was rudely cast away. "Johnnie, you believe it?"

"Don't leave me, mother."

"You believe it?" How stern she was!

"Mother, it must be true."

"There may be an excuse for Geoffrey; there is none for you."

Johnnie's hand began to grope again for his stepmother's, but she would none of it. She got up.

"Mr. Juggins, you can go now. You have done your duty."

"God help you, Jane."

"I need it," she said bitterly.

The minister stole gently towards the door. She suddenly got up and followed him.

"Mr. Juggins, I have been harsh. Forgive me."

He pressed her hand; he could not speak. He

had taken on him an unwelcome task, but he had not expected such treatment as this.

"This subject must not again be mentioned between us for the present. Nothing must be said to Ralph. You are all against him. Should he be spared to me, and his consciousness return, I shall act according to my own discretion whether or not to refer to this matter. But, remember, no one but myself can speak to him."

She went back, but she did not notice Johnnie all that night.

Once only he offered to help her, but she sternly forbade him. She would not let him so much as touch the bed.

CHAPTER XII.

"Methinks I hear, methinks I see
Ghosts, goblins, fiends : my fantasy
Presents a thousand ugly shapes,
Headless bears, black men, and apes ;
Doleful outcries, and fearful sights,
My sad and dismal soul affrights."

DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR.

THOSE were sad days that followed the disappearance of Gip from the Grange. Sad outside as well as in, for autumn was dying, and with every fitful gust fell leaf upon leaf; some brown, some yellow, some golden, but all to cover him in his grave. A chill and mournful dreariness in earth and sky was telling forth to all the world the death of the annual life. It was little comfort to press the face against the panes, each as cold as the other, and look without. And Johnnie throughout that first long, pitilessly long day had done this. It was not that he thought Gipsy would come back again to-day. He had not whispered to himself, "His purpose

must have failed by this time; his heart must have already so yearned for home, that his foot has even now been set thitherward." No. But he watched at the window—the window of the room in which his father lay—the window that best overlooked the winding gravel-walk, and the gate that opened upon the wide road beyond; and for what he watched, he did not know. Maybe he was looking for some one to come and tell him it was all a mistake—his father was not ill—his brother was not fled—himself was what he had even thought himself till last night. But when the evening drew in, and the rain came, and dark prevailed, and no stars were visible, then all the flickering light went out in the watcher's heart, and despair ruled all. It was all true—about himself, about his father, about Gip. Gip would never come back again. Gip was so true to him, that he had left him. Separation was stauncher fidelity than supersession. To be brave here was to run away.

"What a pity you are not eldest, Gipsy!" How often, and especially of late, had this been laughingly said! And Gip had laughed, too, and said what he would do if it were so. And now it was true, and Gipsy had fled. They had never calculated on a reality brought about after this most distressful fashion. They had never pictured Geoffrey, should the heritage be his, running away from it. The only

thing that shone clearly from out this blank, desolate, sky of the present was the reason of Geoffrey's disappearance. Not a thought of Geoffrey's that Johnnie had not instantly recognized, so soon as Mr. Juggins had told his story; not an impulse which did not stir his own blood through a sympathetic consciousness of its cause.

After these many years Gipsy could not brook to be eldest, to the dishonour of the other. He would never come back again. He would hide away, and die! Die of separation, perhaps. Sooner this than supersede himself. No; his brother would never come back again; of that he had no doubt.

But, alas, when Johnnie turned his wan, cold face from the window and looked within, things were no better—rather worse. The thought of Geoffrey outside—somewhere outside in the big, trackless waste; but wherever he was, full of this nobility of purpose, was a gleam of light. There was none within. His step-mother was silently, but unrelentingly stern. The flush of quick and hot resentment was gone; but in its stead sate upon her face a fixed, immovable expression of unforgiveness. How hard, how unrelaxed her features, as by the dim candle-light she cast about her hundred little ways and means of bringing strength and ease to bear upon the sick one!

Johnnie ventured his offer of help no more. He would not leave the room; but he dared not stretch a hand. His step-mother seemed to be unaware of his presence. She took no heed of him. He might have been a piece of furniture, a chest of drawers, a cabinet, a picture on the wall, a clothes-basket, a chair. No, not a chair—for then he might have been made useful. She had never looked at him since last night, to his knowledge; and yet, as he sate stooping there, in the window recess, and when he had not been gazing without, he had watched her every movement—from under his eyes.

Was it his fault? He could not make untrue the story. His fault! Rather was he not the sufferer—the only sufferer? He, disgraced, degraded; henceforward a byword among men, a standing reproach to his father—to his life if he lived, to his memory should he die. He crouched backwards into the recess. He knew why he had not quitted his father's room. He dared not face a living soul else than those two—three, had Geoffrey been there.

Oh, how he longed to die! Oh, how shamefaced he was!

Doubtless his father had longed to die, perchance prayed to die, and his prayer was being heard by Him who sometimes vouchsafes not merely more than we

ask, but almost dare to think. Why might he not die, too?

Once, but only once, the thought had come—why should he not flee, too, as Geoffrey had fled? Why not hide himself in some spot where none should know his name? What was his name? He did not know himself. But why not hide himself in some spot where none should know his story, his degradation, and shame? There was one thing Johnnie feared more than death—oh, how much more!—loneliness. The great mystery of solitude was still as fearful to him in manhood's estate as when he was a little child. He had read "Robinson Crusoe" once, as far as where he is cast ashore, and finds himself—by himself; and he had thrown it down, and a fearful shiver had convulsed him. For days and months, and especially in the night-time, this story had haunted him. He had made up his mind he would never go near the sea, never enter a boat, lest such a thing might befall him. This was in childhood. He was no better now. Imagination picturing horror in detail, was still as strong as ever.

Now, in his manhood, at times he would awake in the mid-night, and could scarce forbear startling the silence of the night with an awful cry in fear that he was alone, and he had felt out with his hand in the dark, and till it had touched and grasped some living

thing—his brother—his brain had curdled, and he had wished to swoon, that consciousness might go. Who can describe that wild fear? What is it? Is it the Invisible that is upon us, or the Inscrutable, or the Infinite? When Geoffrey had asked him, Johnnie had shaken his head. It was not these things, and yet the influence of each was there. He could only say that a sudden terror of *self* had seized him. Did he fear ghosts and apparitions? Again Johnnie would shake his head. He could only say the spirit he feared was his own consciousness; the goblin he dreaded was himself, an entity. The darkness was an accessory—that, and nothing more. He could remember—his memory had often dwelt in fascination upon it—how he had wandered on to the moorland reach above Windle Height—it was broad noon—when all on a sudden the thought came that he was alone, and a great horror had inspired him with wings, and he had fled down, leaping chasms, and clearing walls, till he saw a little child tending some geese on a roadside common; and, gasping for breath, he had sate him down and slowly talked himself into tranquillity again. That little girl was a memory that lay side by side with that of the child-angel and Gip, and the night when he had been locked up alone. The memory never rose up, but he called that child blessed.

Johnnie would die, readily die, but he dared not fly.

They had not been left altogether undisturbed that day. Mr. Juggins had been twice, and on both occasions he had silently wrung Johnnie's hand, coming to the window to do so. Then Dr. Garfitt had been no less than four times, and recommended Jane to have a trained nurse, which she had determinately refused. The muffled bell below had told of numberless inquiries, and Johnnie himself had seen one after another come along the gravel-walk for that purpose. He had not noted who they were; it was not that the day was dark—he had not thought of them. He had seen as one who sees not.

At ten o'clock Jane said, "You will go to bed, Johnnie. I will send for you if necessary."

Johnnie shivered. "What will you do, mother?"

"I shall rest in this chair. I may get a little sleep by snatches." Her tone was slightly more tender.

"Mother!"—it was almost a wail of entreaty—"there is this sofa. Geoffrey is not in my room."

Jane Emlott had never understood Johnnie, but just now it seemed as if some vague knowledge of his fear had been recognized by her.

"You can put on a dressing-gown, and sleep there." He came up to her timidly, and she let him kiss her—nay, she gave him a kiss in return. It was

not one of her accustomed kisses that Geoffrey had recalled; it was on his forehead, and she had not stretched out her hands. Nevertheless, Johnnie went out glad, as glad as he could be, and in a few minutes he returned.

He lay upon the sofa, and soon he slept.

Once, and once only, he woke. What a start it was! He was bolt upright, and a wild gleam was in his eye. But the candle showed him his mother in her chair, and he lay down again instantly.

"What is it, Johnnie?" Jane was by him. She had placed her hand on his forehead. What a tranquillizing touch it was!

"Nothing, mother. I woke frightened; that is all."

He closed his eyes again with a comfortable feeling of her presence upon him. When he woke again it was high day; the candle had given place to the sun. He found himself carefully wrapt up in a couple of blankets and a woollen shawl. He had been "tucked in" in his sleep. His mother must have done it. Again he felt glad.

"Your father is conscious. He does not talk; but he has recognized me. He is looking at you now."

Johnnie sat up. Ralph Lexley lay at the side of the bed, his face turned to the window and to Johnnie. He smiled—just a faint shadow of a smile.

This was better than yesterday, at least.

CHAPTER XIII.

"But what, but what! come they to visit us?"
Love's Labour's Lost.

It was astonishing how full of sympathy with the Lexleys was Lackington at this time. The story of the chapel meeting had quickly been bruited abroad, and every one had formed his opinion at once. Ebenezer Emlott met with universal abhorrence The illness of Mr. Lexley, and the disappearance of Geoffrey, were all looked upon as proper accompaniments of the one story.

It was these things that had aroused their commiseration. Hard words had freely been banded when first the mystery had become a revelation. There were few among rich and poor who had not uttered stern, if not harsh, sentences anent Ralph Lexley. It was not every one who thought with the gentle and kindly dispositioned minister that he had done a gracious if not a wise thing in bringing to his home the innocent pledge of his unhappy doing. Many men, shrewd in

their generation, 'tis true, but not unfeeling at bottom, had pronounced with severity upon this very act. The first deed of this miserable drama had been a crime; the second, however it might demonstrate repentance, was so ill-judged as to be well-nigh criminal. It was not that it was an insult only to his true wife and lawful issue—such a complication as had come about must have been clearly foreseen. Their pity was largely mingled with indignation.

But the tide of popular feeling was wondrously changed when the details of that meeting at Zion came out, and the part that the *ci-devant* deacon had played in it. The chapel-folk could have rent him limb from limb where he stood—only he stood as much as possible out of their way just now. From his house to his mill was not far, and it did not take him into the heart of the town. The church-people were no better pleased. Had it been possible they would certainly have closed the gates of the sanctuary upon him as he walked smoothly up the yew-tree avenue on the following Sunday. But the climax of their wrath was reached when he was seen to push his way with a calm effrontery straight to the Lexley pew. It was long since it had been used, and the door creaked loudly on its hinges as he entered. The sanctity of the place scarcely prevented some of the congregation from expressing their feelings aloud. In the afternoon they

had their revenge. His carriage set him down just as the service commenced. He came in a little late. It was never clearly known who had been privy to the deed, but when Ebenezer sauntered up the aisle, glorying in the thought that all eyes were upon him, as indeed they were, he found that the pew door obstinately resisted all his efforts to open it. It had been screwed in three places to the panel of the pew. After several vain attempts to unclose it, he had to step down from the chancel side, and, in the face of the congregation, take a seat on an empty bench that was set apart for the charity women. No one offered him a place elsewhere.

Perhaps the people who worshipped at the parish church might have been less sore if Ralph Lexley's illness, irrecoverable as it was generally deemed, and Geoffrey's flight, had not followed so quickly upon the meeting and the denunciation of his brother-in-law by the deacon. Every one knew, or seemed to know, that these were related to one another as are effect and cause.

Hence there was a great pity just now for the family at the Grange.

Let there be no mistake. Johnnie was an outcast. There was no thought in the heart of the mothers of Lackington to permit him to renew his associations with their families. The sooner he left the neighbour-

hood the better for him, and the better for them. They were very sorry for him, and it was very awkward to know what was the proper thing for them to do, if they in company with their daughters should happen to confront him in the street. Nevertheless, they were all of one mind. They had children, and virtue must be upheld and vice reprehended. Stern and uncompromising were these ladies of Lackington. Oh, how carefully did they raise their skirts, and shield their white petticoats from the mud on these present wet days, as they made tripping visits one upon another, and gave all other reasons for their coming but the right one—viz., to canvass this new scandal! They were very sorry for Johnnie Lexley. It was wonderful how often they said it. But Clara must be instructed only to bow to him if they met; and if Fanny should affect not to have seen him at all, so much the better. The family petticoat must be lifted over the muddy places, too.

The saddest man, I verily believe, in Lackington, outside the Grange, was Isaac Curling. He would have been much sadder had he known that he was the fountain-head of all these troubles. The deacon had been sufficiently on the alert to allow the genealogist to suppose that he was only relating facts of which he himself was already cognizant. Nevertheless, Isaac had a suspicion that he had

somehow or other forced the secret into publicity. And this and the misfortune itself made him miserable. Johnnie Lexley was the only human being who had ever wound himself round his affections. In him he had found a congenial companion; one who made up in thoughtful criticism what he lacked in passion and enthusiasm; one who revelled to the full in such antiquated trifles as a mouldy headstone, or a yellowed parchment, as much as himself —only Isaac was lost in the object itself, Johnnie in the reflections suggested. Isaac found an exquisite pleasure in pouncing on such a hidden treasure as a coin, an inscription, a manuscript. Johnnie's delight was to ponder over its relation to things that have been. The one set it in his cabinet at home, the other in its niche in history at large. Isaac was a collector, Johnnie a student. Isaac was not ignorant of this mental want, but he was quite satisfied to have it supplied in Johnnie. And Johnnie had come to be the very light of his life. He was thinking just now that the light was quenched.

In this mood he met Cécile Marnott, and to her he had taken a sudden aversion. Johnnie's secret attachment was no secret to him. On the occasion of their last ramble, the young man had taken Isaac into confidence, and he had spoken in despair of Cécile's marked coolness to him of late.

"Good morning, Mr. Curling."

The genealogist seemed inclined to pass without observation.

"This is bad weather, I am afraid, for your pet pursuits." She looked very careworn and ill.

"I and Mr. John can always find something to turn to, wet or fine." Isaac's tone was moody and resentful.

Cécile's face assumed a rich, rosy red. "Has—has Mr. John been out, then, since—his father was taken ill?"

"No; but he knows where to come to when he does. He has still one friend—if I may make bold to style myself as such—to turn to. There's one as won't desert him; no, Miss Marnott, nor cut him i' th' streit, either, like th' rest o' you."

Cécile Marnott's cheeks were suffused with a crimson flush. She was all aglow as an eastern hill against the setting sun.

"I—I have not seen him."

"That's a kind o' equivocating—that is. You've not seed him sin' th' meeting; but you seed him afore, and you never so much as gave him look nor word, though he spoke to you—just when a look or a word from you would ha' cheered him up—no end," concluded Isaac, whose vocabulary had failed in the sudden endeavour to gulp down a sob.

"I didn't know—anything then," Cécile managed to say with an effort.

"I'm a plain-spoken man, Miss Marnott, and sin' you will stop and speak, why, I'll stop and speak too. Mester Johnnie worships the ground as you stands on, as you well knows." Cécile would have interrupted him, but he put up his hand, and went on. "He loved you all the while as you was flirting wi' Mr. Geoffrey—not as it wur Mr. Geoffrey's fault, for he had a fondness for you hisself, and didn't know as his brother wur i' love with you; but you did. Having played wi' his feelings on an' off, you turn your back on him, and willna so much as recognize his existence, now as he's i' sich deep waters o' affliction."

This was turning the tide of assault with a vengeance. Cécile burst into tears.

"I" (sob) "didn't know" (sob). "You are very cruel" (a big sob) "and—and—mistaken" (a choking sob).

"What didna you know?"

"Nothing" (sob) "about—anything." Then Cécile repressed the catching of her breath, and looked bravely out of her red face at Isaac. "Tell Johnnie I will stop and speak to him always, and anywhere."

She hurried past the genealogist, and was a long way off when it occurred to him to turn round and answer her.

Cécile was on her way to her relatives at the parsonage. She had not seen them for some days, as on the previous Sunday she had been kept at the Park, her little charge having caught a severe cold. The housekeeper and Mr. Grewby were quite enough, and more, to superintend Minnie's wants; but the child had pleaded with Cécile to stay with her, and of course it had ended in the governess foregoing her weekly holiday. All these recent events had been faithfully narrated to her by Mrs. Catharine. Geoffrey's absence, Mr. Lexley's illness, Johnnie's trouble—all had been duly dwelt upon. She had not had such a story, or such a listener, for many a long day. You may be sure nothing was lost by the telling.

As soon as Isaac had gone on his way, Cécile slackened her step; and it was as she slowly walked to the Haddocks that a distinct determination evolved itself out of all her heart's timidity and irresolution. The genealogist's attack had done it. Till then she had been in a mist; she could not see her way clearly. Now she was resolved what to do.

It was inevitable that Geoffrey's disappearance should be a subject of conversation. "If the reason be the one stated, he is a very noble fellow!" said Aunt Haddock.

"Have you called on the Lexleys, aunt?"

"Your uncle and I are going this afternoon to inquire after Mr. Lexley. Dr. Garfitt says he is conscious. We shall simply leave our cards."

"And Mr. John—you will speak to him?" Cécile was looking Mrs. Haddock straight in the face. Her aunt seemed somewhat taken aback.

"Yes, certainly. But I do not think he—that is, they—will care to be seen at present."

"Aunt, I will go with you. I must see Mr. John. I was very rude to him last week; worse than rude—insolent. I shall ask him to forget it, and forgive me."

The tone was quick and impetuous. Her words came with a swift rush; low, almost hushed, but invincibly determined. There are many people—they are generally women—doubtful of self, and diffident of purpose, who on occasion can display a fixity of will which only surprises the more as it is the more rarely called forth. Then it carries all before it. It is like the little rivulet that day after day trickles quietly under ferns and leaves. A little stone will well-nigh stem its course; but if a great tempest hath come, it is so swollen as to sweep the valley with a force that nothing can withstand. There was a tempest at Cécile's heart just now, and the current of a passionate purpose was strong and high. Mrs. Haddock was stunned. She had no power to resist

Cécile at this moment, and the end of it was that, without word of gainsaying, the three went forth together.

There had been no opportunity for whispered councils betwixt Mr. and Mrs. Haddock, for the girl stuck steadily to the side of the latter. Thus they reached the Grange, and the parson as yet knew nothing of this little rencontre, if an onset could be so called which had met with no apparent repulse. Mrs. Haddock was peculiarly silent. A new and hitherto unsuspected light was dawning upon her motherly heart. She was groping her way into a fresh knowledge—that peculiar knowledge whose increase is said to be sorrow. She did not seem happy.

"My husband is better. He is quite conscious; but cannot speak." Jane had met the party at the door. She was wrapped in a thick shawl. "I was about to take advantage of this little snatch of sunshine. Will you come into the garden?"

Cécile did not like the arrangement. She had seen Johnnie at the window upstairs, and he had seen her. He would not come out. Of that she felt sure.

"I think he will recover; but Dr. Garfitt gives no hope beyond a partial restoration."

"His brain has been overwrought," said the

parson. He was sorry he had said it. He was not thinking at the moment of causes.

"He has been anxious, doubtless," replied Jane, stiffly. Johnnie's illness wore down his spirits very much."

Poor Jane! Who would ever have suspected that she could be guilty of retaliating evil with evil? Johnnie would not have been ill but for the Haddocks' niece. But her heart was still sore and angry. Just now she was even more sensitive to inflections than words, although the parson had made a mess of it with the latter. The inflection betrayed what the words would conceal. It was impossible for the visitors to hide that they were to be very careful what they said this afternoon—also what they did not say, as Mr. Haddock's unfortunate blunder showed. The slightest modification of tone will prove a terrible traitor when the ear is preternaturally sharpened.

"Mr. John will be a great support to you." This was Mrs. Haddock. It seemed a safe expression.

"He misses Geoffrey."

Mrs. Lexley's two elder visitors did not know what to say. There was nothing confidential in this declaration. The words were quietly defiant. There was opposition in the speaker's eye. What a pity they had met Jane at the door. What a dangerous

thing is sympathy sometimes. Mrs. Haddock did not know that it was Jane Lexley against the world. She had no idea—how should she?—that there was one creature in Lackington who doubted this story, least of all that that creature might be Mr. Lexley's second wife.

They had gone once round the central walk. A maid was in the hall, the door open. "Tell Mr. John that Mr. and Mrs. Haddock are here." Cécile's heart gathered strength.

Johnnie came out and joined them a minute afterwards. He walked clumsily, and with a mean, delinquent gait. He did not look up as his hand was shaken by each.

"Johnnie!" Everybody was startled. The tone was so angry, so passionate. "You had better go back to your room, if you cannot show yourself a man. It might be criminal to have a father ill."

But conversation became easier by-and-by. They fell talking upon extraneous subjects. It would have been better if they could have done so earlier, for such a topic was ready to hand. Nature was undergoing one of its manifest changes of dress now. It was preparing its winter's shift, in place of the luxuriant robe of brown and purple it had lately worn. The last twenty-four hours had been one of those late autumn days that work a revolution. A myriad

lingering leaves had fallen under the rotting rain. This afternoon was a time when you could fairly introduce the weather, and wax sentimental if you liked over autumn's withering treasures, as they lay, stripped of all beauty, at your feet. The Haddocks and Jane did not become sentimental over them, but it was a relief to fall upon such a neutral topic as they suggested.

Cécile and Johnnie had dropped behind. Which of them had brought it about, or how, probably neither could have told.

"There are still a few apples left," said Cécile, looking over the low shrubbery into the orchard.

"They are very hardy. Would you like one?"

"You cannot reach them."

"There is a short ladder against the gable there. I could find you a ripe one, I dare say."

"I will take it to Minnie. She is always speaking of your goodness to us in the wood. Have you seen anything of those strange people who molested us? I cannot help thinking we were needlessly frightened; only—the fact is, I am convinced I have seen the woman before. I did not recognize her then, but my memory has done so since. I can't tell when or where."

They were in the orchard now. The ladder was set against the wall; a bough extended hither. The

tree was more sheltered, and Johnnie thought the apples would be riper with the house-warmth. They were beyond the hearing of the rest.

"I met Mr. Curling this morning, Mr. John. He said that you were hurt by my excessive rudeness the other day."

Johnnie was looking up in the tree; he had not made up his mind which apple was ripest. Cécile, on the contrary, was looking down at her feet. Her hand was on the ladder.

"Was that all he told you?" The tone was somewhat quick, as if something, an insect, say, had stung him.

"Not all. He told me something else."

"He told you that I loved you. Did you not know before?"

"I think so—in the wood."

"I should have asked you to be my wife two days ago, had not these changes come." His voice had changed, too. It was an utterance of quiet but most terrible despair.

"There is no change to me." It was not said softly, rather with a brave boldness. She looked straight up at him, too.

But Johnnie did not seem to hear her. He picked the favoured apple, came down, and gave it her. "I shall remember to-day when the real

dark days come slowly one by one. It was very good of you to give me an opportunity of telling you this. I am glad to have said it—before we separate."

"Separate!" A mist was coming into Cécile's eyes.

"Yes, separate. I do not know much of the world, but I know more than you. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Cécile, dreamily.

They rejoined the other group. There was a brief general conversation, and soon the visitors were gone. It was strange, had Mr. and Mrs. Haddock noticed it, that the apple lay upon the ledge of the window by the path. Cécile's hand had been resting on it.

CHAPTER XIV.

"'Thanne artow imparfit,' quod he,
'And oon of Prides knyghtes
For swich a lust and likyng,
Lucifer fel from hevene.'"

The Vision of Piers Ploughman.

THE days passed on, as days will do, whether bright or dark, and there was a manifest improvement in Ralph Lexley's state. His consciousness had returned. He could not speak, but he could signal his wants, and the presence of Jane and Johnnie seemed comfortable to him. It would scarcely be true to say that his mental faculties were wholly restored, for a certain vacant expression on his face told that, without doubt, his memory was not as yet at full play. There was a hazy cloud upon his brain. By-and-by, doubtless, this indistinct glamour would become painful, and the awakened intelligence would set seriously to work, dividing the light from the darkness. Then perchance it would be found that the night of an obscured comprehension was better than the day of a restored knowledge. At present he was too

feeble to care to understand. As without he preferred—if he had any preference at all—to have the window-blind down against the daylight; so within his mental intelligence lay in a passive condition, not caring to arouse itself into the recognitions of facts and circumstances.

"Mother, I am going to the mill this morning."

"It is quite time." The tone was not unkindly. "There is no further need for two. There will be the novelty of your coming and going to amuse your father. A state of expectancy will be better than this blank and supine indifference. It will rouse him, and he will watch for you. You must tell him how well the manager has carried everything on during your forced absence.

In another day or two there was a second stage of improvement, though it was quite possible that a relapse might be the result. Memory began to revive. Occasionally an undefined look of curiosity and wonderment would cross his face, as if the sick man were feebly and dreamily endeavouring to gather up the threads of circumstance. The dividing of the light from the darkness was coming, and day with it.

From this time the invalid became slightly more restless. The aspect of dull inattention vanished. His eye followed Jane as she moved about the room. He had got to that stage of convalescence when the

hushed whisper and noiseless tread become far more irritating to the nerves than the customary pitch of the voice and the habitual step. Let the eye be strong enough to pursue the doings of the sick room, and then the time has come to give up muffled converse, and to cease that cautious stepping hither and thither on the toes. Jane was quick to discern this. She returned to her accustomed tone. She employed herself as much as possible on the side of the bed whence his face looked out. And when it was clear to her that memory was regaining its function, she began to read to him to divert his thoughts. And throughout patience never expended itself. From first to last she wore that quiet smile which only those who are strong and observant can recognize as the saddest outcome of suppressed inly suffering.

On one of the afternoons of these earlier days of Mr. Lexley's convalescence, Johnnie came in, and then beckoned Jane out of the room. He looked at once excited and depressed.

"There is a letter from Geoffrey. It came to the mill."

It was well for Jane that tension was unnecessary. She was out of reach of her husband's eye and ear. No one could have known during these past days how wholly and constantly was Geoffrey present to her mind; her own son, the child she was secretly so

proud of; he whom, in her anxiety not to treat with more affection than Johnnie, she had scarcely treated so well, though by inverse proportion she had loved him the more. Benjamin was less to Jacob what Gipsy was to Jane. Reuben and Judah were of his own begetting as well as Benjamin. But she had not cried in travail for Johnnie; he was another woman's son; Gipsy was her own. Ben just now she was scarcely considering at all. She had so early allowed her brother to look upon him as his adopted child that she had, as it were, surrendered somewhat of her duty to Ebenezer himself. Besides, there was no concealing it, Ben had none of the attractive qualities of Geoffrey. She almost feared her nephew as she feared her brother. He had ever been of a sly, secretive turn. Geoffrey had always been frank. Even in their childish peccadilloes Gip had ever been more openly and ingenuously naughty than Ben. While, too, the latter would sulk his punishment out, Gipsy would laugh, Spartan-like, and admit that the operation was necessary, which in itself was almost a proof that it wasn't.

Jane loved Geoffrey with an intensity which, in sheer terror thereof, she was obliged to hide. Let alone her duty to Johnnie, and the obligation of trying to show an unprejudiced front in the mutual relations of the two to herself, she feared her affection

for Geoffrey for her own sake. He had forced her from all the positions she had formerly taken up.

Jane Lexley had been educated in a narrow and strait school. She had grown up in that curious religious atmosphere wherein everything earthly is viewed as a *snare*. I do not allude to such "strange abominations" as going to the play, or dancing. These were subjects to speak about with 'bated breath. People who danced or went to the play were of the Canaanites. No; I refer to those capacities given by God to be used for the softening down of the rigours and austerities of life. Every amenity was a snare. Reading was a snare, except it were the Bible, or "Bunyan," or "Baxter." Music was a snare, saving it were from the psalmody in use at Zion, and without instrument. Animal spirits, native instincts, a disposition to laugh, or titter, or play with boys and girls, all these things were snares. Even the purchase of sugar-candy, or ginger-nuts, was surveyed from a strictly religious platform —indigestion went for nothing—and solemnly pronounced to be a snare. Jane had never kicked against the pricks. She grew into a woman, composed and decorous, years before her childhood's limit was passed; a living woman—for no amount of austere training could hinder her from being that; but stunted in growth, and with her nobler impulses stifled.

It was strange, strange to herself, how Geoffrey had upset her foundations. She viewed all things as she had been trained to view them, but she could not bring her own education to bear upon Geoffrey's. It seemed as if in his very infancy, long ere mental discrimination was possible, he had turned round upon her and laughed at her. Punishment had effected nothing. He had endured it in a good-natured fashion that in itself ridiculed her intentions. He read books there was no harm for him to read, saving for the disobedience of the act; other books, too, which probably he had better not have read at that early stage. He had bought a flute with his pocket-money before he was ten, and preferred secular melodies to the psalmody. At twelve he went out and played with other boys; and by-and-by the cricket-field resounded with praises of his prowess. His spirits were high, and nothing could curb them; his laughter rung out loud and clear. From first to last it would seem as if Jane could suppress not a single instinct of his nature. That which her parents had accomplished she failed of utterly. The more this proved itself to her, the more she loved the boy. And now that he was gone, the light of her life was gone too.

"A letter from Geoffrey! Where is he?" She did not wait to be told, but snatched the note from Johnnie's hand.

It was dated from London—only London, nothing else—and the handwriting was not quite so round and flourishing as Gipsy's characters were wont to be. It had been penned hastily, and was not long. "Dear Johnnie," it ran, "you must stick to the old place, and the property. Do not think of me as unhappy, and don't let mother think so either. I'm just the kind of fellow for this sort of thing. I fancy I was always fond of roaming. I was whistling with my hands in my pocket for five whole minutes this morning, so it is quite clear I shall soon be quite at home in this big place. What a lazy dog I've been! I must set to in earnest now. Give my love to father and mother, and keep your spirits up. Mine are famous.—GEOFFREY. P.S.—I shall be as rich as a Jew in a couple of years. I'm going to work so hard, and I'll give you all a lift."

There was a forced jollity about this letter that did not escape either Jane or Johnnie. But nothing was said upon the subject.

Jane put the note in her pocket. "I must go back to your father," she said. "I am sorry Geoffrey has been so misled. He ought to have known better."

But when she was out of Johnnie's sight, she put the letter to her lips passionately. She sank upon her knees, and for the first time since all this accumulation of misery had befallen her, she allowed Nature her

bent. Her tense brow was relaxed, and her throbbing temples were relieved by a long fit of crying.

Jane had never seen her brother since the meeting and her husband's illness. The time had been when she had held by his word in preference to that of any other human being. When her parents died she had transferred instantly her obedience to him. His rule had been that of a rod of iron; but she had willingly submitted, feeling that he was in a peculiar sense the higher power. His opinion, or rather hectoring commands, had been paramount. She had become a slave to his will, his temper, his habits, his religion; for she never doubted that he had one. Even after she was married, many years elapsed before she actually overcame that feeling that he was her master, ere she realized to the full that she was now out of his jurisdiction, whether it should tend to good or evil. Past influence had remained a present power. But there came a day at length when she began to discover the danger of her position—wedded to a husband, bound to a brother. She had been startled on that afternoon—she loved to dwell on it, for it brought back her boy to her—when Geoffrey demanded that if Johnnie was to be punished for being found at Isaac Curling's, Ralph Lexley must do it, not Ebenezer Emlott. "Your sneer I leave mother to resent," he had said, when her brother received her husband's name with con-

tempt. From that day hence she had taken an inspiration from the boy. She had gone back to her housewifely duties agitated and frightened. Was it true, that which Geoffrey had seemed to insinuate—had she listened to her brother in neglect of her husband? In her heart's depth she had always been grateful to her child for a lesson she had never forgotten.

From that same day, too, she had begun to discern the weaknesses of Ebenezer Emlott's character. She did not doubt all at once that he was a religious man, or that his life was framed after a heavenly rule; but she could not hide from herself that he was not the man she had accepted him to be—accepted, for hitherto she had never studied him. The mantle of her father and mother had fallen upon Ebenezer; and like the young prophets, she had at once met him, and bowed herself to the ground before him. As long as he could, he had kept her there. But now the weak joints of his harness became visible. It troubled her to find that he was greedy of gain; that he was ashamed of his parentage; that the greengrocery stunk in his nostrils; that he did not condescend to men of low estate in the spirit she would have liked. Herein was perhaps a pardonable offence. It is possible that Ebenezer dreaded lest men of low estate might treat him as one of

the confraternity. It is not every man who can stoop with safety. The truly ennobled condescends from his throne, and is content to carry with him the quiet atmosphere of an accustomed dignity. Ebenezer could not condescend without carrying his throne with him. Thus only could men recognize his exalted claims. This pride of state began to make Jane sad for her brother. Then, but more slowly, she came to the perception that Ebenezer was anxious to be a prominent support of the material fabric of Zion rather than a spiritual pillar, a corner stone, polished after the similitude of a heavenly palace. He would sooner be a power than a pattern, and bear sway over other men's wills than influence their hearts. This knowledge came slowly; but, like truths slowly learnt, it left an abiding impression. By the time of the extraordinary meeting at the chapel, the manufacturer had lapsed from his pedestal. Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth, before the light of pure, scarching truth. Jane even doubted her brother's principles.

The story of Ebenezer's baseness had not reached Jane all at once. This part of the evening's proceedings had been avoided in Mr. Juggins' recital. The old man thought wisely, or the contrary, that this should be reserved till grief had become subdued over the greater trouble. But when she did learn it

at length, she was overwhelmed ; not so much with sorrow as with indignation at the outrage. She had been angry with Johnnie, and even with Geoffrey, although he had nobly surrendered all for his brother ; but against Ebenezer her heart went forth in burning reprobation.

He had not called at the house as yet. She had given orders that if he did, he was to be detained, that she might see him. Her anxiety to confront him face to face was great. Until now the opportunity had not been given by him ; for herself, she could not leave her husband's bedside. When that time came, she would expend all the scorn that was in her upon him. The vials of her contempt should be poured out upon his head to the last drop, and then she would have done with him for ever. She would wipe out his memory, if she could, as she would wipe off a stain from her dress. Only let her recover Ben from the clutches of his presence and influence, and she would strive to forget his existence. She could have written to tell him so, but she wanted to look him in his dastard face and tell him so. The suppressed opposition of years was in her soul. The past had no more check upon her.

But he did not come. He dared not face her—so she would face him. This very day she would see him ; for she could now leave her husband for a

short space at a time. She had read Geoffrey's letter. That letter, breathing loneliness and dejection in every line—though every line spoke of an opposite feeling—would never have been written but for her brother's villany. Gipsy would have been at home cheering and inspiring cheer at this moment but for Ebenezer. Her indignation waxed hotter and hotter. She took her bonnet and put it on, and then she went forth to Lansdown Grove, carrying the letter in her hand.

She found her brother in, and just about sitting down to his dinner. She had walked into the dining-room without waiting to be announced. Ben sate opposite to his uncle, and Tomkins was superintending the table.

She took all in at a glance. The room was large and comfortable. The curtains, a rich crimson, were drawn. A gilt candelabra overhung the table, and a dozen wax tapers shed a soft and luxuriant light upon its contents. A soup-tureen of silver was set before the manufacturer. He himself was dressed in a careful evening costume; his front white and frilled; his coat black and glossy; his whiskers trimmed and cut short; his face smooth and expectant of the good things before him. He had just said "grace." They had had "grace" said at Mr. Grewby's; so that was, of course, quite correct. Everything about the man bespoke wealth, and a

care to surround himself with all those costly indulgences that wealth can procure.

Somehow all the flaming anger she had felt went out. In the stead of it came cold and pitiful contempt.

"Ah, Jane, is that you? You'll take a bit o' dinner wi' us?" He spoke loudly, but it was easy to be seen that he was quaking.

"No meat for me, thank you, in this house. The life is more than meat. I prefer genuine consistency to mock-turtle. I came here to upbraid you with your base and cowardly behaviour to my husband—your sister's husband. I have changed my intention. I do not reproach you. Shall I tell you why? I have been looking at your room with its costly hangings, your table with its surfeit of delicacies, yourself with your face of smooth self-complaisance, and something tells me it would be wasted. You are beyond the shafts of scorn. Arrows cannot hurt the dead; and such are you, for there is no breath of probity or rectitude left in you. You are perished through pride of wealth."

"I always said I'd be rich, you know, Jane. Besides, my taste hasna bin bad. Look at that carpet. Where there's judgment like that money can't be much misplaced, I should say."

"Let me see," said Jane, as if mentally calculating.

"For this room and its contents you've bartered away your honour, your religion, a father's example, a mother's prayers, your repute among the chapel-people, your sister's happiness, your brother-in-law's life—possibly. You need not interrupt me. I know how jealousy of his superior portion has hounded you on to this last act of turpitude and disgrace. All this you have sacrificed for greed of place among men."

"You're a bit sore, Jane. You don't mean half you're saying."

"A bit sore! How truly I said you were beyond reproaches. You, better than any other living being, can best measure the length and breadth of all the evil and misery you have brought on me, your sister, the only sister left you—the only living link that binds you to the past. And the sum of your reflections is this: that she may be a bit sore. How meaningless my intended words of passionate reprobation would have seemed to you! I doubt me whether even my contempt be intelligible to you. I dare say you think me silly and trivial. Probably I am tedious, and you want to get on with your dinner. Ebenezer, will you give me back Ben?"

"Ben! What do you want with Ben?"

"Look at him there. He's still young. I might save him. Charlotte left him to both; and the world

will consider you have the better claim. Still, will you restore him to me?"

"What do you say, Ben, lad?"

"Aunt is very kind, too kind. I do not deserve her kindness. But you have been very kind, too, uncle; and I feel it would be ungrateful to leave you, so long as you are pleased to have me with you."

"I will leave you, Ben. Do not forget in years to come that I stretched forth my hands to save you, and that you would not. Your soup will be cold, Ebenezer. I will go."

When Jane reached the Grange, a servant met her at the door. "Mr. John said I was to give it you as soon as you returned," she said, giving her mistress a note. Mrs. Lexley took the missive somewhat carelessly. She was still lost in thought on her brother's deed. She went straight to the sick-room, however, and after dismissing the attendant, sat down to the fire; and the candles not yet being lit, she read the note by the glowing embers. It was very short, and from Johnnie himself. "Dear mother, I could not stand that letter of Gipsy's. I have gone to find him, and bring him back again. When that is done we will then consider what I must do. I have left everything at the mill in order, and Mr. Sparker will manage the concern in our absence.—

JOHNNIE. P.S.—I shall not be lonely if only this excitement will last. It prevents me thinking."

When Jane went to bed that night, she wished she had not been so hard upon Johnnie.

CHAPTER XV.

"'Gone? is Gabriel gone?' and concealing her face on his shoulder,
All her unburdened heart gave way, and she wept and lamented.
Then the good Basil said—and his voice grew blithe as he said it,—
'Be of good cheer, my child: it is only to-day he departed.'"

Evangeline.

I THINK the reader will agree with me that Jane Lexley was having her full share of trouble just now. Her husband was only just out of peril of his life. He stood accused before the world of a criminal act. Her brother, by having discovered this charge, and by the way in which he had discovered it, had proved himself from henceforth unworthy of her affection. It was not now even a question of unworthiness. She had no affection to lavish upon him. She had cast him off. Then Geoffrey was—she knew not where; and now Johnnie was gone. Truly could she cry out—and she did cry out in the depths of her anguished soul—"All these things are against me."

To-night Ralph Lexley was restless. He had not

closed his eyes yet; and so far as his position would permit, his glance had roamed about the room in a dissatisfied, uneasy kind of way. Latterly it had been Johnnie's custom to sleep in the next room, but he had always come to say "Good-night." He had talked cheerily, as cheerily as was possible, for about five minutes, and then wrung his father's hand that was uninjured, and then gone. It was quite clear that the father was waiting for the usual proceeding, and was mystified, not to say disturbed, by the non-appearance of his son.

There had already been sufficient difficulty in explaining the absence of Geoffrey. It had been a hard task not to say too much nor too little about it. The subject itself had been avoided as long as it was possible to do so, but at last it was clear that something must be said. There are expressions of the countenance which cannot be misread; and when Ralph's face said as distinctly as words could say, "Where is Geoffrey?" it was high time to make some allusion to the subject. For several days he had been seemingly content with a general answer that Gip had been suddenly called away, and that probably he would be home again in a few days. But when a few days were gone, and again the question stood out on his lips though no sounds followed, it was manifest that he must now be put off with a more precise, though

more evasive, reply. Geoffrey was in London. He had written to say he was very well, and happy, and would be home again by-and-by.

This explanation had been given on this very night, almost immediately after Jane's return. She had given it calmly enough, but in her heart there was a great dread; for if he should miss Johnnie also, then all further prevarication would be at an end. In the face of a possible relapse concealment would be out of the question. Even now she knew he was purposely refraining himself from sleep that he might not lose the nightly parting. At this very moment his eye was wistfully searching so far as it had range for the tall figure and pale face of his best-loved child; his ear was open for the sound of a step on the stair, and a turn of the door. Gradually, as the time wore on, and Jane proceeded to undress herself, there was a look of balked expectation in his expression, and "Where is Johnnie?" was writ legibly on his lip and in his eye.

It was weary, painful work affecting not to have seen the questioning look that had gathered upon the sick man's face, but this seemed to be her only chance of putting him off for this the first night of Johnnie's absence at least. In the morning she would reveal his departure from home, and explain it in such a way as careful reflection during the dark watches

of the night should suggest as the best. She carefully shaded the candle from her husband's eyes, said her prayers—she was a long time on her knees to-night—and then, with her dressing-gown upon her, laid herself down upon a truckle-bed which she had had wheeled into the room and set in a position where she could see the invalid, and out of which, too, she could be on the instant at his side.

It was quite evident that Ralph had given up the expectation of seeing his son. He shut his eyes, and tried to sleep. Earlier in the evening he could have slept easily. There had then been an effort needed to keep awake. But he had become restless and excited, and now the inclination to slumber was gone. He was aware that something had happened. He knew it, if by no other sign, from the fact that Jane had avoided his look of appeal. The brain, when too feeble to reason, is oftentimes quite capable of seizing upon the conclusion to which the several points and periods of mental debate would have tended. Ralph Lexley was as sure that Johnnie was not in the next room as if Jane had told him so. He was equally sure he was not in the house. Johnnie not at home implied a mystery. Who could ever remember a night when Johnnie had not slept at home? Even Ralph Lexley's memory, enfeebled as it was, did not err here. He grew more and more

uneasy; and midnight, nay, an hour beyond midnight, found him still awake, and restless, and disturbed.

Jane, to escape his glances, had shielded the candle-rays from both his own face and her own; and how it was, she could not tell, but for once sleep took strong hold of her senses, and from the first moment she laid herself down, she was steeped in a sweet forgetfulness of all her troubles.

Another hour passed away. Jane was still fast asleep, when she was startled into a sudden consciousness by finding that some one was roughly shaking her by the arm. It was her husband. He had got up in bed by some unsuspected energy that was yet his, had crawled to its foot, and then reached out his hand that was not paralyzed to his wife's couch, which was just within the range of his arm.

"Oh, Ralph, I fear you have injured yourself!" She was out of bed in an instant.

"Hish!" he said, putting his finger to his lip, as if beckoning silence. She did not quite understand him.

"I fell asleep. I don't know why or how."

She was preparing to place him tenderly into a recumbent position again.

"Hish!" he again said, with a prolonged sibilance. He placed his hand to his ear. His eye was eager, and his lips moved, though no further word escaped him.

They both listened. There was not the faintest sound to be heard. The night was very still; not a breath of wind was stirring in the trees outside. He had got excited and feverish; his mind was slightly wandering, thought Jane. She was determined to watch him for the rest of the night. As soon as she had got him into a restful posture again, she would prepare him a cooling draught. As thus she was meditating, a sudden noise as of a pebble striking the window startled her.

"Hish!" again said Ralph, triumphantly.

"Whatever can it be?" said Jane in astonishment, not to say consternation.

"Jo-Jo-Jo-hnnie," stuttered the sick man, quite agitated with his joy. His eyes gleamed with a wild delight.

Even while her husband was struggling to get out the word, the thought that it must be Johnnie returned, had flashed upon Jane's brain. Her heart rose up into her throat with a quick throb of thankful emotion. How speedily had her prayer been answered! The second wanderer was back again almost ere he had started. And yet she did not wonder at it. She had felt convinced that he would not dare to face—not the task to which he had set himself, but the loneliness of it. Jane had learnt more of Johnnie's peculiarities during the last

few days than during the whole of the years she had previously been associated with him as his step-mother. Yes; he could not but return. Oh, how thankful she was!—thankful for Johnnie's sake; thankful for his father's sake; thankful for her own sake; for how could she possibly have avoided the painful excitement of a truthful disclosure of Johnnie's absence, and some, at least, of the causes that had led to it?

These reflections were compassed in a moment, and Jane hurried to the window. She drew up the blind. There was no moon, but the night was fine, and stars were visible above and through the leaf-stripped trees. She fancied she saw a man's form below. She knew that herself must be clearly seen, the room being lighted, and therefore she beckoned downwards to the door below. Then she wrapped her dressing-gown closely around her, put herself into slippers, and taking a taper, steered her way down the stairs, and along the lobby to the front door. Here were double doors—it was an old-fashioned house—and it took some time to unfasten the several chains and bars that secured them.

At last, however, she had opened the inner door, and the great, heavy, ironbound door that lay behind it.

The outer draught, or, as the night was perfectly

still, probably the current created by the opening of the door, blew out the light.

"Is that you, Johnnie? Your father will be so glad."

A pair of strong arms were thrown round her—more muscular than Johnnie's—and a voice, deeper than his, said "Mother!" It was Esau and Jacob over again; only Jacob was the "hairy man."

"Geoffrey!"

Then there followed kisses innumerable, and embraces not to be counted, and a long interlacing of arms and inlocking of hands. The darkness was welcome; it could not hide their joy, and it added sanctity to their meeting.

"It's all right, mother—hurrah!" cried Geoffrey, half sobbing, half laughing. There had not been the faintest chance of a word till now.

"Yes, you're back again. Thank God for His mercies!"

"With all my heart, mother, for I've brought news with me—glorious! Where's father, and Johnnie? We must have them all up. Oh, mother, the story was false—and—and Johnnie's heir, and he shall marry Cécile, and—all will come right—and—hurrah! Give me some supper, mother, I'm peckish. That barrel of beer isn't finished yet, is it? Best tap Nevins ever sent us!—hurrah!"

"I knew it was false. I have never believed otherwise." Nevertheless, Jane's heart was filled with thankfulness. "You have the proofs, have you?"

"Yes. And I've something else to tell—most extraordinary thing that ever happened."

The candle was now re-lit. Geoffrey could see how changed was his mother's face. She had faded well-nigh into the shadow of her former self. Her eyes were sunken, and her lips so pinched and thin, that the young man's gaiety was instantly dispelled.

"Your father's ill, Gip." She saw his face fall.

"And you are ill, mother."

"No; only I've been watching and nursing ever since the night you left home. I want rest, that is all. Your father has had an attack of paralysis, and is still in considerable danger; but the great peril is over, and we may hope that ere long he will be partially restored to us. He cannot speak."

"I will go and see him. Come, mother." They went upstairs. As they reached the landing, he said, "I will not waken Johnnie to-night. I suppose he's tired enough, poor fellow, with all this harassment and annoyance." Geoffrey's cheeks burned. This subject of Johnnie's birth had never been alluded to between mother and son till now. How could it? Gipsy had fled when he first heard that false tale—believed, because it was told as true.

"Johnnie has gone to find you. He left home last night."

"Alone?" Geoffrey was quite aghast.

"Yes. I'm very apprehensive about him. Far more than I was about you." How easy it was to say this, now while she had got his arm in hers, and could hear his voice, and know that he was back home again! Still, in a sense it was true. Geoffrey could battle with the task he had set before him better than Johnnie his.

"We must talk about this as soon as I have seen father."

"Geoffrey!" His mother laid her hand upon his shoulder. She had to reach up to do it. They were close to the sick-room. "You must say nothing about this false report. It has never been mentioned to him."

"It might ease his mind, and thus help to restore him."

"Not a syllable, except from my own lips," she whispered fiercely—so at least it seemed to him.

"All right, mother."

Ralph Lexley was resting in his customary posture. He looked at Geoffrey for an instant with an expression of deep delight, and then as suddenly came a glance of the most abject terror. He tried to get up in bed. "Jo-Jo-Jo-hnnie?" He thought

Geoffrey's coming at this unwonted hour betokened that some evil had befallen his eldest son.

Jane laid her hand soothingly on his brow, and bent her head. "Johnnie is quite well, so far as we know. There has been a mistake, that is all. He has gone to London to meet Gipsy, and Gipsy has missed him. We shall have him home in a day or two. You must go to sleep now."

Ralph looked at his wife, and grew more tranquil. He got Geoffrey's hand in his, and smiled, and tried to show him how glad he was to have him there again; and, still holding his hand in a firm grasp, went off into a dose, which itself terminated in a deep and wholesome sleep.

Geoffrey gently freed his hand. It was evident one of the servants must be aroused. He remained in his father's room while Jane woke Mary the cook. In a few minutes she was seated by the bedside, rubbing her eyes, to make sure they were not deceiving her. It was Master Geoffrey, sure enough, as missis had said. All the servants were fond of Master Geoffrey. She would have worked his arm like a pump-handle or the churn, but a silent pressure of the hand was all that was admissible; and that over, Jane and Geoffrey stole out, and downstairs to the kitchen.

Geoffrey had expected a different coming home to this.

"Mother," he said, "I'll not tell a word of my story till Johnnie is present to hear it—not a word. I've been dreaming of this very kitchen, and this beer and cold rib of beef, and you in that rocking-chair, and Johnnie here close beside me, and the servants out of the way in bed; and everything's come true but—but Johnnie." Geoffrey's lip quivered. "I feel as if I could die with my lips unsealed, unless Johnnie knows everything. I must go and find him and—at once," he added, rising up from the table.

"Oh, Geoffrey, you will wait till to-morrow? I will not ask you to stay longer than that. You must find Johnnie—but you must have some rest first."

"I shall never rest till Johnnie is back again. A bed would suffocate me, mother; blankets would stifle me. But I'll finish my supper. I dare say I shall need it. When did he go?" Geoffrey sate down and plied his knife and fork once more.

"About noon, I think. He did not come to dinner. Here is his short note, which I found after I had come in." Jane did not say where she had been. This was not the time to think or talk about Ebenezer Emlott's conduct. Geoffrey read the few words Johnnie had scribbled to his mother.

He said nothing, but ate away harder than ever. He cut another hunch of bread, and another plateful

of beef. He refilled his mug from the favoured tap. By-and-by he said—

"He's gone to London—that's certain."

"Yes," said Jane gloomily. What could Johnnie do in London? And how could Geoffrey find him out in such a wilderness of living folk as that?

"He's taken the afternoon mail from Barston, as the Kilverts did." He was eating hard all the time.

"The Kilverts? Who are they?"

"I'll tell you some day. It's the quickest coach going. I doubt whether this new railway, when it's finished, will do it much quicker, though there's so much talking about twenty miles an hour, and no stoppages."

"You can't overtake it?"

"I'll try. Part of the railway is finished. I could, maybe, gain on them there."

"Gipsy, don't go on the railway. I'm frightened. I'm sure it is very dangerous. Mr. Juggins is not quite sure whether it is not flying in the face of Providence to invent such things."

"I don't think I shall. If I stick to the road I shall know I'm on their very track, and that's a comfortable feeling in itself. Molly's in the stable, I suppose?"

"Yes," assented Jane sadly. Geoffrey had come home only to wander forth again.

"I shall want some more money? I've scarcely anything left. You'll find seventeen pounds—three fivers, and two in gold—in my writing-case upstairs. This is the key." Jane took it, and went upstairs. She brought down seven pounds in gold, in addition, from her own store.

"That will do famously. And now I'm off. Never fear for me, nor for Johnnie, mother. I'll overtake him, and when I've told him everything, we'll come back the happiest, merriest pair of lads you ever saw. Old times shall be nothing to it. No, you shall not go to the stables; a dressing-gown and slippers won't do for that kind of work. Good-bye." There was a loud smack. "Nobody can kiss like you, mother," he said, laughing. Then he went out, and Jane locked the door after him. But she watched from Johnnie's bedroom window; and indistinct as everything seemed at first without, she had got so used to the darkness that she fancied she could make out the basket phaeton and Molly, the little sturdy bay mare. At any rate, she could hear its hoofs striking against the stone pavement. She thought, too, she saw Gipsy wrap himself well up in a large horse-rug. She knew there was one, and her maternal solicitude was alive on the point. Then everything—mare, carriage, Gipsy, and rug—went slowly out of the yard, and disappeared.

"Cook, will you see if Master Geoffrey took the stable-rug with him?" she asked in the morning.

Cook went out into the yard. "Thomas says it's not there; though whether Master Geoffrey's ta'en it or no, he can't say. He's rather vexed like, is Thomas, ma'am. He says as he might ha' bin waked up. He's so fond o' Master Geoffrey, he is. I tould him there wasna time for't. He says he could ha' dressed i' no time, so that wouldna ha' mattered."

CHAPTER XVI.

"You see this chase is hotly followed."
King Henry V.

In after years Geoffrey Lexley was called upon to look back, as other men, upon a life of many vicissitudes and adventures; but none abode in his memory with such a green freshness as his journey to London in pursuit of his brother. Even as age began to creep upon him, and with it a duller perception, and a more sluggish pulse, his eye would sparkle, and his blood quicken, as he told once again his oft-told tale.

Little had he thought, as he drew near home on that eventful night, that within an hour of his entry therein he should be so rapidly drawing away from it. Still more strange it seemed to be for a second time in such a brief interval making the best and quickest of his way to London. Nevertheless, this was a very different affair from the other. Then he had slowly dragged his feet along, with a heart steeped to the full in bitterness and despondency. He had no knowledge

that he should ever see his home again, the spot where his life hitherto had been spent. For aught he knew, Johnnie, his mother, and his father, and the Grange, might become reminiscences, and to the end of his days naught else. Almost worse than all this, he had gone forth, and did not know whither he was going. Like every other runaway, he had turned his face to the metropolis; for though all its teeming multitudes of faces would be strange to him, he had rather lose himself in a peopled wilderness than hide away in a barren and lifeless desert.

How different now from then! He was used to strange faces, and London was no longer new. The apprehension of the unseen and unknown was passed away. It was no *ultima Thule* now, the furthest limits of his travelled fancy. He had been made familiar with its thoroughfares, he had realised its magnitude. This time, too, he knew whither he was going, and its purpose. He had to find Johnnie; that is, follow up one of those great roads that, like all other arteries, would lead him to the heart of the land, the centre of national life. And when he had reached his brother, he had splendid and glorious tidings for him; such tidings as would lift him up out of the dust of his supposed degradation, and set his feet on such an established pinnacle of respectability, that every man, woman, or child who was at present scorning or

pitying him, would be glad to have him hold out his right hand of fellowship to them once more.

And there was something else. Who does not know what else? He was in chase!—a young fellow of muscle and spirit, and he was in pursuit of no less a vehicle than a Royal mail coach. Fox-hunting was nothing to this. It beat all such small fry as the Glapton meet into flinders. His lip curled at the self-suggested comparison. For many a mile yet to come the road was perfectly familiar to him. He knew every roadside cottage he passed, that looked as fast asleep as its inmates; every rural church with its sacred garth, beneath whose sod were lying those who still more deeply slumbered, whose waking must bide awhile as yet. He knew every gate, every turning, every tree that seemed to pass him as he passed them, so quickly he sped. He knew to a yard where the turnpikes lay, and how much he had to pay, and he had the money already in his hand, although he was quite aware that some time must elapse before "John" or "William" or "Sarah"—he dreaded Sarah most; what tongues those women have!—could be up to unlock the gate and chide him—how fully he appreciated the comparison implied!—"for disturbing *honest* folk at this time o' night." The sharp air more than Sarah's "He's arter no good, that felly isn't," nipped his blood just enough to brisk him up and invigorate

his sense, only he felt to want no impetus of any outer kind. Was he not racing the "High-flyer"? Was he not handicapped by three hours at least? Was not the course something like two hundred miles? Was not Ludgate Hill and the Belle Sauvage the goal, and Johnnie the stakes? No; he wanted no refreshers on this journey; no glass of steaming half-and-half just to keep the blood from freezing, you know. Not to-night, thank you!

Molly knew her master, and appeared to know her work too. Her trot never flagged. It was about a quarter to six o'clock that Geoffrey found himself in the Deansgate of Manchester, that needle's eye of rich merchantmen, dwelling in the metropolis of calico. How narrow it seemed! how hard not to graze the gables that stood out right and left of him! He had been in Manchester before now, and had tasted the hospitalities of the Star.

"A chaise and pair for London. Sharp's the word."

"Ain't a bad word in its way," said the startled stableman; "but I'd prefer another just now. I's bin up with th' coach. Bill!"

"Well, what 're you making that row for? There's bedrooms over 'ere, and folks sleeping in 'em."

"There's a gen'leman wants a shay and pair o' 'osses. Look sharp."

A young lad about sixteen years old rose out of the obscurity of the other end of the stable chamber, rubbed his eyes, stretched his arms, and yawned to the point of dislocation. He could scarcely be said to be in *déshabillé;* for he was attired in tight drab breeches of kersey, top-boots rimmed with dirty-white leather, and a yellow and black striped waistcoat which, as it had sleeves and reached down to the thigh, might be called a coat.

"Where's it for?" he said.

"London."

"You'll ha' to pay six pun's down as security. Bob'll take it. I'll get th' 'osses out. Jist wheel that shay out, Bob."

"Stop one moment. What time did the 'High-flyer' leave this morning?"

"At four; leastways it's booked to leave at that time, but it wur a moment or two late."

"It arrives at Ludgate Hill at twelve to-night, doesn't it?"

"Ay, barrin' accidents; not as we ha' many. We goes th' level route."

"It's now half-past six. Can you overtake the coach before it reaches London?"

"They won't let me." Bill pointed significantly with his thumb to the hotel. Presumably he referred to the proprietor. "'Osses is 'osses, and they isn't

mended as easily as chairs, and sich-like. Besides, th' coach itself goes at sich a lick for a coach, that it 'ud be all we could do to catch 'em."

"I'll give you five pounds over and above all charges to yourself, if you catch the 'High-flyer.'"

"Five pounds!" Bill's kerseys were seized with a violent fit of trembling.

"You don't get five pounds every day?"

"No; nor every week, nor month, nor year. I' fact, I don't doubt it's my due, but I never seed sight o' one as I could call my own yet. Virtue ain't at a premium jist now. Spekilation is; 'specially i' railways."

"Bad times for honest folk—eh?"

"Very," said Bill decidedly, but with a tremulous action of the corner of his eye, something resembling a wink. Rogues is ha'ing their innings at present. Bob and me's getting quoite thin. Fi' punds! I'm your man, sir." Bob and the postboy displayed great activity. In a wondrously brief interval the chaise and horses were out, and Geoffrey and the lad in their places. Bob got such a tip that he was propitiated into the expression of a fervent hope that the new-comer "wouldn't hesitate to wakken him up every night till Christmas."

"I didn't go to the Commercial coach-office," said Geoffrey, as they rattled along Market Street. "I thought they mightn't be open."

"The best plan's to go stret to the stables, as you did; saves a mint o' time." Five pounds will go a long way towards making the recipient think the giver endowed with high prescience.

They passed the Moseley and Albion, and into the London Road in silence. In ordinary travel the conversation generally precedes silence. You begin at the outset to strike up acquaintance with your fellow-passengers. The disposition of your seats demands it. Then, as your commonplaces become exhausted, weariness sets in. The progress becomes dully monotonous, and you try to sleep, or read, or you fall into abstractions. Geoffrey's inclination lay the opposite way. Until the chaise had reached Macclesfield he had scarcely opened his mouth. His attention was seemingly riveted on the horses' heads. He looked neither to right nor left. As they rolled downhill into Stockport, he laughed aloud in his delight. They would overtake the "High-flyer" to a certainty. As they took a breather up the ascent beyond, dejection brooded upon every feature. The coach would escape. When the level came, he was equanimous—neither elated nor depressed; or if equanimity was impossible, hopefulness had the best of it. But he never spoke, and he never looked aside. The post-boy humoured his bent. Probably he was thinking, too—of his five pounds, and its expenditure.

"Change 'osses 'ere, sir. You'd better get a bit o' something t' eat."

"No, thank you.' We'll have the calash down, though."

The change was quickly made. As grease is to wheels, so is silver to the joints of the human harness.

"We've a splendid running piece 'twixt here and Brummagem." Bill was inclined to talk. He had been conversing with the ostlers; and having begun, was not disposed to stop again all at once. "Beats the Derbyshire road hollow. It's so up and down, that is. There's a dip below White Hall as takes twenty-five minutes out o' the Buxton coach, and there's places welly as bad for th' London coach afore you gets to Matlock. They's never sartin o' th' time."

"They've had some bad accidents on that route, haven't they?"

"You may say so. They're timed to be as quick as us, and they can't do it i' safety. It's pot-luck wi' the passengers. I don't mean for to say as it's all bad. They've splendid running fro' Derby, and through Leicestershire."

"But we've a good road, too?"

"Taking it all through, it's th' levelest i' th' country. There's nowt can beat our coach, unless it's th' railways; but they're not agate yet—not all

through. They's stopped some coaches, too. There's bad times coming for our trade. What'll they do with th' coaches? Bob and me's fairly flustered o'er that question. 'Osses can be used i' other roads, but th' coaches—what'll they do?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Geoffrey, scarcely listening. He thought Bill had dropped the pace.

"That's a poser, that is. I yerd a ostler from the Moseley saying t'other neet as it wur like to become th' question o' the day, and that they wur to take it up i' Parliament."

"Aren't you slackening?"

"Twelve miles to th' hour. 'Tain't so bad, if you comes to think on it," responded Bill comfortably. "We'll catch 'em. We've it i' our favour, as Mester Robson's aboard."

"Robson—who's he?"

"Doan't know Robson? He lives i' Lever Street, near th' Infirmary. He's twenty-seven stun, and weighs so heavy on th' coach they has to stick ballast at t'other side to make it up. Th' gen'lemen outside did complain rarely when he got up; though I niver thought as he would ha' got up. There wur a good deal o' shoving behind afore he wur fairly planted at th' top. I calculate o' twenty minutes out o' him—and that's summat. Don't ye be feart. We's got to do it, and it mun be done. I've a weak-

ness for fi'-pund notes.' That wur the bargain, wurn't it, sir?" Bill looked slightly anxious.

"Yes, if you catch the 'High-flyer.'"

"Dun," said Bill, grasping Geoffrey's hand, as if the transaction were only just taking place.

Then again there was a long silence, only disturbed by the sound of wheels and iron hoofs, and an intermittent chuckle that emanated from the postboy. The country lay level in front; but on the left, and to the rear, could be seen an irregular pile of hills that showed where the Derbyshire Peak lay. Their sloping, shelvy sides were scarcely distance-dimmed, for the morning was transparently clear; and the October wind, however bleak, made the air free of all obscurity from murkiness and smoke. Every instant carried Geoffrey further and further out of the line of his former journey, that seemed so long ago, although so brief an interval had passed. It was behind those hills, through winding valleys that were invisible, he had dragged his weary feet, cramped in every limb, and still more sore in heart. A momentary sadness fell upon him. But there was no need of effort to shake it off; it quickly gave place to the joyous influences of present circumstance.

How the morning labourer stared at them as they flew past! He had to take a drink out of his

can to recover himself again; and no wonder, for just now they were indeed all but flying. There was not another vehicle in sight; not a single claimant to contest the right of way—the road was absolutely theirs. "Now for a gallop," the postboy had said; and evidently the horses had meant it as well as he. There were so many trees on either side that almost it seemed for miles like one continuous avenue. And although the autumn was all but overpast, there were leaves enough to tell that he was dying hard, and loved this earth like other folk, and like them meant to linger here as long as he was able. As they neared the straggling villages, or orchards that lined the route, there were damson trees in plenty, and pears, and apples; so thickly shocked together their several fruits, that what with green, and gold, and deep—oh, what a deep!—purple, you might have thought that Pomona herself had grafted them from some especial stock, and sent her favoured gardener to care for them. But even the pippins did not seem more roundly cheeked nor rosy than the children who were trooping to school, and loitered with happy dilatoriness to watch the chaise sweep by, and then redeem the time thus lost by following hard at its rear. But not for long. The little brown legs soon tired of such a serious game as this; and ere the biggest and fore-

most lad had made up his mind that it was impossible to catch them, the calash was all but out of sight, and the noise of wheels and steeds growing faint with distance.

"What is that place in front?" said Geoffrey after awhile.

"Newcastle. Change there," he said cheerily.

But he came out of the inn with a slightly gloomy aspect. "They was only seven minutes late 'ere," he said to Geoffrey; "and they'll make that up at Brummagem. Mester Robson hasna made sich a difference, arter all."

Geoffrey became dejected. He did not say anything; he feared conversation might make the boy forgetful, and relax his energies. Thus the day wore on. There was a murkier sky now; for the Potteries were reached. Chimneys—nothing but chimneys everywhere—belching out smoke, were visible. The traces of agriculture faded away; the trees were withered and stripped; the hedges were begrimed with dust; and long stretches of wall, tame in their regularity, took all sentiment out of their chase, e'en though the quarry was nothing less than the "High-flyer," with Johnnie himself at the top. Now, too, they dared not race along so fast; for there were carts to graze, and people to knock down, unless caution was exercised. At one place there

was a lock; at another the road was undergoing repair; and well-nigh everywhere there seemed to be stationed old crutched women, or reckless children, waiting to cross the pathway expressly at the instant the chaise was coming up. Even the postboy got irritable; and when he got irritable, Geoffrey in his heart gave up all for lost. He did not say so, but despair was altogether uppermost.

"It'll be th' same for them," the lad said at length. "Them," of course, was the coach.

"So it will," rejoined Geoffrey hopefully. He had not thought of this.

Still the day wore on. They had passed Stone, and Stafford, and Walsall, and then at last—how slow that "at last" had been to come!—Birmingham was reached. Here the grand saving was to be made. Cheese and bread, and cold meat was stowed into the chaise, a fresh pair of horses was buckled to, and they were on their way again.

"They was ten minutes late when they left; and that, added to th' time they took for breakfast, or lunch, or whatsomdever they call it, gives us a big pull. We'll do it. I think you said fi' punds?"

"To a certainty, if you catch them," cried Geoffrey eagerly.

"Dun!" Bill grasped his companion's hand with all the energy of one who has closed upon an agreement as favourable as unexpected.

The afternoon passed, evening stole on, and darkness with it. The day had seemed long, incredibly long, to Geoffrey, and yet the night surprised him. It appeared such a short time ago since they were evolving themselves out of the gloom and obscurity of the early morning. They had sped onwards through Coventry, and Dunchurch, and Daventry, and Towcester—nay, they had left Stony Stratford behind them. They had not wasted the moments. Bill was now the silent one. His eye was set, his lip determined, his hand almost motionless; he had scarcely touched the steaming flanks of his steeds for an hour past, but Geoffrey did not chafe. He knew that this was the pace that would tell best in the end. There would be more last in this regular monotony of speed than in intermittent efforts. There were no hills to climb, no sharp turns to take, no hollows to descend; all was level and straight, and the chaise was bowling with a smooth evenness that told, although the rattle and jolting of a roadside spurt was wanting. He did not chafe, but it required a strong mind to remember this just now. Philosophy has not the best of chances at moments such as these.

He could get nothing out of Bill. The postboy had settled down into a reserved and reticent frame. He was not moody; only taciturn. He replied to Geoffrey's questions as to their progress with mono-

syllables, interjections most of them; not "Yes" or "No," which, whether tending to elation or depression, would at least have been satisfactory as being lucid; but "Ay, ay," or "Jist so," or "In course." Nothing could he make out of rejoinders such as these. Brevity is very praiseworthy when it is intelligible. Geoffrey was driven back upon his own reflections.

All day he had been building up the future of Johnnie and himself. His brother Johnnie, the heir of the Lexleys—he could not suppress a chuckle at the thought—should be married to Cécile, of course. She must be compelled, if needs be, to this view of the matter. He would see her himself, and implore her to be Johnnie's wife. In his mind he had a dim impression—how it had come there he did not know—that there had been some love-passages between the two all the time that he was striving to induce her to look favourably upon his own suit. That Johnnie had loved her as well as himself, he was perfectly convinced; perhaps he had loved her before. He blushed to think how selfish he had been; for such obtuseness as this must have arisen from supreme selfishness, nothing less. How much better, too, Johnnie had loved her than he. It was easy to say that she and he would not have suited one another after all, and that they, or rather she, had found it out. The plain truth was he had not loved her with the quiet intensity

of Johnnie's love. His passion had been like a blustering, swollen torrent, that chafes and rages the more, as it the quicker expends itself. His brother's affection had flowed in a quiet and subdued stream, the more silent as it was the more purely deep. Yes, Johnnie had long been in love with Cécile Marnott, and he was more worthy of her than himself.

Then he laughed. Bill veered round and stared, but said nothing.

"I was only laughing at something."

"I' course." His face went frontwards again.

And Geoffrey could not but laugh a second time as he thought how easy it was to recognize his brother's greater deserts, when he himself had Louise Grandperrot to fall back upon. That Johnnie was more honestly worthy he really believed—there was no hypocritical confession there; nevertheless, it was wondrously easy to say it, and own it, when—and Geoffrey's eye grew tender, and his lips parted into a smile—when his own demerits had found so undeserving a prize as Johnnie's cousin. Louise's exact relationship to himself he could not tell; but it did not matter. She should soon be his wife—that was better than cousin, or half-cousin, or step-cousin—and he would be true and faithful to her, and make her life blessed; and making her blessed she would thus be a blessing to himself. Cécile had refused him, nor

given him even a hope—and this might well damp a man's ardour and constancy; but beside and beyond that, he knew that he loved Louise better than ever he had loved Cécile. Cécile had been his first passion. His true heart was Louise's, and she had as good as promised to be his. If Geoffrey was not over-modest, at least he had never mimicked the virtue. He knew that whenever he reached Bristol Street, and claimed Louise, she would give herself to him. Knowing this he did not affect to believe otherwise.

Still he would want to see Cécile and Johnnie betrothed, before his cup of happiness would be absolutely full.

And then Geoffrey gave himself up wholly to thoughts of Louise; and time flies rapidly when such as he think upon such as she. They were driving at a tremendous speed, considering the darkness, down a slope.

"That's St. Alban's," said Bill. There were lights twinkling in front. Both were silent. They would know their fate very soon. This must be their last change.

"Pair o' 'osses quick. How long's the coach been gone?"

"Better nor quarter of an hour nor more."

"That'll do. Look sharp."

Once more, and for the last time, they were off.

There was no mistake about Bill's intentions as to this new pair. He grasped the whip, and gave them a smart flick under the girths. "Better let 'em know what they's got to do at th' outset," he said. The horses gave a bound upwards, and then set off at a round gallop. At first there was a stray lamp or two to guide them, then an occasional twinkle in the small-paned windows of the cottages; and when they were clear of these, there was still the clear night, starlight, and all but sparkling with frost. The very air seemed luminous. "A moon would ha' been better, but stars'll do when all's clear o'erhead," quoth the postboy. Well he might say so. There was not a little star in the blue vault above that did not seem to have trimmed its lamp in their behalf. Not the gauziest, most fleecy cloud was there to check the lustre of a single orb. Bill plied the leather thong, and with every smart the goaded animals sprang forwards with new energy. How the trees and hedges seemed to be racing the other way! How the fixed stars seemed to be reeling up and down! How the hard, crisp road seemed to tremble beneath the swift revolution of wheels, and the ringing hoof! Every wood and hollow gave back a faithful response. So they flew on, and neither spake.

"Do you see yon red light?" at length Bill said. He broke the silence suddenly.

"Yes."

"That's the 'High-flyer.'" Both were many a stage beyond excitement. It might have been the veriest commonplace. It was said in a low, calm voice; but its very subduedness revealed the pressure of pent-up feeling within.

"I can't stand this," burst out Geoffrey. "Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Bill.

"Hurrah!" yelled both in concert.

"I'm better now," said Geoffrey. "Give 'em another touch of the whip, and we'll be up to 'em."

"And then I'm to ha' fi' pund. That's the agreement as we comed to, wasn't it?"

"The moment you catch them, the money's yours."

It is our profound conviction that Bill was going to be down on Geoffrey's hand, with a "Dun!" on the strength of this entirely new and unexpected contract; but we cannot speak with absolute certainty, for at this precise instant, there was a crunch of the wheel on the postboy's side, then a collapse of the curricle, and then Geoffrey found himself tumbling downwards upon Bill. At the same moment the horse to the right shied and made a mad plunge into the air. Then the other did the same. Then both dragged the vehicle, sledge-like, for about a dozen yards, till it turned clean over against the hedge. Then they stood stock-still, shivering with fright.

Of course neither Geoffrey nor Bill were dead. The absurdity of such a *dénouement* must strike the most unintelligent of readers. But Bill lay very still, with his face to the clay, and his legs were bearing the full weight of the calash. Geoffrey had been pitched wholly into the quickset. The spines drew blood in face and hands, but he escaped with scratches.

The "High-flyer" was not fifty yards off. Johnnie within fifty yards! He shouted wildly after his brother, but the coach went on its way, and in another moment the red light had disappeared. But others heard. A cottage lay on the other side of the road, about twenty yards ahead, and a man was standing there. He had come out "just to see th' co-ach pass," as he afterwards explained.

With his assistance the horses were untraced, and the calash raised. Bill looked crushed, and unconscious. They lifted him up, and carried him to the cottage. "Better try a douse of cold water," said the countryman. But just then the lad revived.

"It's lost," he ejaculated feebly.

"Ay, it's close to town by now," replied Geoffrey sadly.

"Town be hanged! it's i' yer pocket!"

"Oh, it's the five pounds you mean. We should have caught them but for the wheel coming off.

Don't harass yourself about the money; you shall have that."

It was wonderful what an effect this statement had upon Bill. He got up—not without assistance, though—stretched out his arms, rubbed his eyes, and declared that it was over now, and he was right as a trivet—well, nearly. They would take the horses to the inn further on, and he would see about a conveyance. He reeled a little as they went out, the cottager with them; but the fresh air seemed to restore his shattered energies, for he followed Geoffrey's lead with wonderful briskness. The inn was soon reached. Fortunately the landlord was not yet in bed. A small spring-cart was all he had, but the gentleman was welcome. But there was no one to drive; his son was away, and he had "rheumatics" in his right arm. But this difficulty was overcome. The countryman proffered his aid. He had heard the conversation about the five pounds. It is possible his willingness was associated thereto. Geoffrey left Bill sitting before the cheerful hearth, with a bowl of steaming toddy before him, and five pounds in his pocket. Bill was thoroughly happy. So at least it seemed to Geoffrey as he went out.

When Ludgate Hill was reached, and the Belle Sauvage, Geoffrey could hear nothing of Johnnie. Three of the passengers were in bed in the inn, the

rest had gone their several ways. Having fully convinced himself that his brother was not of this trio, he settled his account with the countryman, and went forth into the street. What should he do? Whither should he go? He was woefully disappointed. It was sorely trying to be within an ace of success, and to have failed after all. He was very hungry, but this never occurred to him; fatigue and want of sleep—of all he was unconscious, though this was the third night that he had spent out of bed.

He had closely questioned the yard-man at the inn. With the aid of a shilling, that worthy was enabled to recollect that a tall young man had got off the coach. He had no luggage, and looked scared, and frightened like. After lingering about the place a short time, he had rushed out somewhat suddenly, and had not been seen since.

"Had he spoken to any one?"

"Only to ask his way somewhere." The yard-man had not caught the place.

"Is the gentleman he spoke to in the house?"

No. It was a very big, stout man; over twenty stone, he should say. He watched him, he was so fat. He went off almost immediately afterwards.

"Did he take a cab?"

"No. He'd no luggage, 'cept a small bag, which he carried hisself."

Thus Geoffrey was utterly at sea. He slowly wandered into one street, and then, after a minute or so, retraced his steps and turned into another. He had no reason for doing so; he was without compass or bearing. The act was expressive of simple indetermination. What should he do? Should he go to bed, and wait till morning? The thought was no sooner suggested than it was rejected with passionate scorn. Such a course would delay the search, and carry Johnnie but the further from his pursuit. Besides, he was sure that his brother was not in bed either. He was in the streets somewhere —all alone, and already sick with terror at his ill-resolved and precipitate purpose. Perhaps even now he lay somewhere under the sky, helpless and stunned, and all unable to undo his deed. To think of Johnnie alone in the heart of this big place, filled Geoffrey with the most uneasy apprehensions. Johnnie might in a wild moment do something that could not be recalled; lay violent hands on himself, or go distracted and mad. Every moment increased his fears. He hurried forward blindly, whither he knew not.

He gave a sudden start. Who had whispered it? It seemed as if a voice, rather than a memory, had spoken the words, "If ever I found myself in London, I would ask my way to Westminster Abbey. I should care to see nothing else." He could not

remember when and where it was said, but he knew who had said it. Quick—a cab! But no cab was in sight; only a policeman on his beat.

"Which is the way to Westminster Abbey?"

How eager he was! The policeman stared at him almost suspiciously. Apparently he was satisfied that Geoffrey had no intention of setting fire to the venerable pile, for he gave him the direction. Geoffrey scarcely waited to thank him, but pushed on his way, his fears as to Johnnie's safety enkindled at every step. He felt timorous, and dreaded the noble abbey, as its walls came sombrely upon his view. There was the river, too, beyond. Geoffrey had taken a sudden shrinking from that river. It flowed much too near the abbey, he thought.

But he was rewarded. Almost immediately he came upon his brother. He knew it was he, as he saw that crouching figure at the western door. As he heard a step drawing near, Johnnie looked up, uttered a wild cry of delight, and fastened himself upon Geoffrey. "I came to seek you, and you have found me instead." Then all at once a piteous sadness overspread his face in place of the late joy. He cowered abjectly away from his brother. They had not met since Johnnie had learnt what he was. How was he to know how Geoffrey would receive him? Perhaps he would not like to be touched.

"I beg your pardon, Gip," he said, retreatingly.

"Nay, lad, don't crouch like that. It doesn't become the heir of the Lexleys."

"What! Have you not heard?"

"Ay; I've heard more than you. It's all a mistake! You came into the world in an eminently respectable manner," he added, laughing cheerily. "It's all owing to uncle's villany, and father's reserve, that this absurd story got about."

Johnnie felt it was all right when Geoffrey laughed like that. It was exactly the laugh that had comforted him that night, many a year ago but never forgotten, when Gipsy came to his room, and, with his coming, his fright passed away. Yes, he was sure it was all right. But if Gipsy had not supported him, he had fallen prone to the ground.

It did not take them long to find a bed; but it was early dawn before they fell asleep. They had so much to say to one another. Each had his story to tell. How easy to tell it, when the ending was so happy! Johnnie was quite positive that Louise must be the sweetest, tenderest girl that ever breathed. "Except Cécile," said Geoffrey; and the elder did not deny that he had so excepted her.

It was broad, high day before they woke; but when they did wake, it was to a sense of supreme content and felicity. Sorrow had been drained out

of the universe. A new dispensation seemed to have begun.

And, indeed, so it had. What man so hapless that he has not at least once in his life entered into the dawn of such a dispensation?

And yet there was one more sharp stroke for them; for even at this moment their father lay dying.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I am a gentleman of blood and breeding."
King Lear.

EBENEZER EMLOTT'S life was not without its excitements just now. He was in the heyday of his glory. The eyes of all Lackington had been concentrated upon him for several days. If their glances were the reverse of kindly, that troubled him little. Besides, he had other things to think of. He was about to be married; nay, it seemed likely that there might be two weddings in one. The spell of Maria's money was fascinating Ben.

"Tomkins."

"Yes, sir."

"Tell Parkinson to have the carriage washed and re-varnished, and to get a new pair o' top-boots for himself. They mun be rimmed with white. I'm going to be married—some day next week probably."

"Yes, sir." There were times when Tomkins affected no surprise. He chose to look upon the

command as one of ordinary import. He superintended the arrangements of the breakfast-table with the most unimpaired composure.

"I said married, Tomkins."

"Certainly, sir. That waistcoat, you know, sir. Just like Sir Reginald Fitz-George Sackville St. Omer. He was engaged the same evening as he wore it. He was married—that is, the dowager duchess married him—a fortnight after. I knew how it would be. I hope you'll suit, I do indeed."

"She's—ahem!—particular, you think?"

A look of painful commiseration lay on Tomkins's face. The Dowager Duchess of Dashwood was very particular, sir—particularly so."

"You think she'll—ahem!—make changes?"

The footman seemed in a lugubrious frame this morning. His tone was low—almost solemnly low. "The Dowager Duchess made great changes, sir—very great changes indeed. Sir R. F. S. St. Omer thought so, at least. Take another egg, sir?" Evidently Tomkins considered that the more aliment his master took the better. There was a peculiar emphasis in his invitation.

Even Ebenezer Emlott wondered to see how readily the bride elect met all his wishes about the wedding. Originally, it was to have been a month hence, that she might order her trousseau from

London. Originally, it was intended to have been the gayest affair of the kind ever seen in Lackington. But a certain event had worked a change in the bridegroom's feelings. He was not quite sure, since the issue of the extraordinary meeting at Zion Chapel, that the large concourse of spectators who might be admitted to the church would preserve all that order and decorum which such a solemn service should demand. He had not forgotten the angry hubbub, or its accompaniments of eggs and cabbages. It was a custom at Lackington to throw slippers at the carriage as it drove away from the church door, care being taken that they should be clean ones, and not be discharged with unpleasant violence or too great nicety of direction. What if this ancient and laudable usage should be observed in a manner less punctilious and more discomposing than heretofore? He considered the matter afresh, and the result was that he besought Mrs. Bland to appear at the altar a week rather than a month hence. She consented with an alacrity that filled him with gratification—that, of course, but with a certain wonder also. She seemed to have fallen in with his views with greater readiness than might have been expected from one who had occupied such an exalted position in society in the south, and whose son was to come in for so many properties when he had reached his legal age. It

was very complimentary. He felt it to be so. Still, it was rather strange, he could not help but think.

Thus it fell out that Mrs. Bland's preparations were of the quietest.

A few evenings preceding the wedding a tall, military, and cadaverous-looking gentleman appeared, with a large brown-paper parcel, at Westbourne Villa. He was very fierce-looking at ten yards' distance—the mildest of men at two.

"Well, Emily, I am come, you see. Little thought to be made useful so quickly again."

Mrs. Bland seemed neither glad nor sorry to see the new-comer. It was clear, however, that he was expected.

"I have taken a room for you at the Unicorn. You'll be in the way here. We shall be very busy, you know."

"Expensive?"

"It's the best hotel in the town. But the bill will be paid for. You'll not run up anything excessive."

"He's money, of course. You're too sensible to make any mistake of that kind. How did you manage it, eh? Not a bad show here, I must say. Ha, ha! You're a clever woman, Emily."

"Thank you. You've a better coat than that, I trust, for the wedding?"

"Yes; I've the complete rig-out, bran'-new, in that

brown-paper case. 'Twas hard work, though. You'll help me there, Emily? I'd the greatest difficulty with Welfitt—you remember Welfitt's, in Pump Court? I owed him money already, but when I mentioned your name, he was awful. You didn't tell me you hadn't paid Thomas's account. He wanted to know where you were. I saw your danger, and became instantly obtuse. Wasn't quite sure whether you had settled at Yeddo or New York. Would make some inquiries, if he was anxious for your patronage again."

"He's not the only one who has made tender inquiries after my health and whereabouts," said the lady, laughing. "It was very thoughtless of you to refer to me; but I think most of my troubles are over. Mr. Emlott is a rich man, and—well, weak-minded."

"You've invested that £400 well. I wish I had been born a woman, and clever. What will Maria do?"

"I've not quite made up my mind. There are two nephews of my husband's—that is, of Mr. Emlott's; but one has left home. It's a long story, and I haven't time to relate it. The other is with Mr. Emlott, and will be partner in his concern. It is possible, too, he may be the gainer at home by his cousin's flight."

"He will marry Maria, I suppose?"

"I am anxious to see her settled, I confess. He's a suspicious young man, and sees infinitely further than his uncle. He is inclined to suspect the real state of things. If I can only secure the engagement before I leave home, I shall be truly thankful. You can help me there, captain."

"A few allusions to our ancestry and the family generally, I presume. William the Conqueror—Normandy—the castle in ruins down in Montgomeryshire—the armorial bearings—and all that."

"Nothing of the kind. That will do very well for my—for Mr. Emlott. Indeed, as you have mentioned the subject, you would oblige me greatly if you could casually furnish a few reminiscences of that character in his hearing this evening."

"My memory's bad for history; but I'll try—1066, that was the date, wasn't it?"

"Yes, that will do," laughed the lady.

"Shall I say 1067? It looks rather too—too accurate; don't you think so? He might suspect I'd been reading up. Besides, a little variety is never displeasing, you know."

"But the Conquest did happen in 1066."

"I could say our ancestor—what's his name, by-the-by?—point-blank refused to accompany William that year; hadn't made up his mind whether he wanted any more landed estates; didn't like to miss

the grouse shooting, down at what's its name?—rather cheeky to William the Conqueror, in fact. So he put it off till the following spring when the fighting was over. That's more like our family. Wonderful how hereditary some qualities are. I've been in the army twenty-three years, and somehow, I can't exactly explain it, but I've never been draughted out of the country yet."

"Well, I will leave all that to you, but it won't pay with Ben. Money—let there be no mistake—it must be money with him. You can make a few allusions to the Scotch estates."

The captain looked jocose. "How delightful to be at a new place! Such a saving to the inventive organ. You've fallen back upon the old lines."

"Why not?"

"Of course, why not?" Mrs. Bland's brother—for Captain Bold Hardy was her brother—turned to go. "You'll see about that bill of Wellfitt's, Emily?" he said in an anxious tone.

"Perhaps. You'll not forget Ben and the money? I'm uneasy about Maria. I should like to see her settled."

"And I'm uneasy about that account. I'd like to see it settled. It's a nice outfit, full military costume. I thought you'd like that, Emily. Of course it's more expensive."

"The string is unfastened. You've been trying them on, I suppose?"

The captain looked slightly disconcerted. "There was no one in the coach, Emily, but a middle-aged gentleman, and it was dark, and—he was fast asleep—and—and—I'd nothing to do—and—they fit to a T, Emily. T stands for tight, you know. Then the gentleman awoke—such a nice man, with the most benevolent face I ever saw. He sat opposite to me, and we got talking, and he made some allusion to the parcel; so I couldn't be so rude as not to let him see its contents. He was such a nice gentleman—wore blue spectacles."

"You're as simple as ever, Bold."

"I'm still impecunious, if that's simplicity. Good-bye for the present. I'll drop in to-night. You don't happen to have a—a few shillings about you, Emily, do you? Just a few little items that can't go down in the bill, you know; half-a-crown for the waiter, and a few coppers for boots; they'll want an extra polish—ha, ha—don't you see?" It was a croaky kind of laugh.

"Will five shillings do?"

"Very well indeed—remarkably well. It's a very nice round sum of money is five shillings. Ten would be better, that stands to reason, but I've nothing to say against five shillings."

"Emily gazed blankly into a little drawer in her cabinet. "It doesn't matter," she said. "It will be all right after to-morrow morning if no hitch occurs. Bold, I'll let you have a sovereign. Don't spend it rashly."

A tear, a *bonâ-fide*, veritable, honest tear, stood in the soldier's eye. He clutched rather than took the gold. "It's like a new colour, yellow is, Emily."

He strode out with a wide and stridulous step. What a fine military air he had! The little boys stopped in their play to watch him down the street, and to hear his boots creak.

Punctually at seven that same evening Mrs. Bland and Maria sate in the drawing-room, dress and manner both betokening that visitors were coming, or at any rate expected. We might have been contented with the first word, for at that very instant the bell rang. "How dreadfully punctual he is, mamma! I hope he doesn't expect you to be the same?"

"Perhaps I shall be able to cure that," said Mrs. Bland, with a quiet smile. "Don't forget about Ben, darling."

"I had better run through all the 'rules and ordinances' once more. Firstly, I am to play that piece that Ben likes twice. Secondly——" But here Maria was stayed; the door opened, and Ben and his uncle appeared. The captain followed in the rear; the three gentlemen had met at the door.

"My brother, Captain Bold Hardy, Mr. Emlott. This is Mr. Emlott's nephew, Bold."

There was no question about it that the two Lackington gentlemen were taken aback by the grandeur of the stranger. His height, his momentary fierceness, his military bearing, his dress—so tight, how had he got into it?—his sword, everything conduced to make the manufacturer feel at his awkwardest. Had he had confidence enough left to speak he would have plunged without doubt into the dialect that had been familiar to him cotemporaneously with the sale of cabbages and pease. Luckily for him he was speechless. Mrs. Bland's brother was no fool in one respect. Having spent his life and what money he had in creating effects, he was peculiarly capable of recognizing the effect when created. He saw at a glance that he had overwhelmed his brother-in-law who was to be, and that gentleman's nephew. His pride rose as his pride was soothed. He inwardly determined that this state of being overwhelmed should last out the entire evening.

"Interesting occasion—ar—very," he said blandly, addressing the gentleman to whom it might be supposed especially interesting. Ebenezer was not a little man, but the other seemed to be looking down upon him from an awful height. Tight trousers make long legs so preternaturally long.

"Extra-ordinary, I should say," responded Ebenezer nervously. Oh, if he could but be sitting down over a glass of port, or be allowed to insert his thumb into the arm-holes of his waistcoat! But Tomkins had forbidden this last, and Mrs. Bland knew better than permit the first.

"Extraordinary indeed. I congratulate you, sir, on your entry—ar—into the family. I could—ar—have wished, sir, for blood"—there seemed plenty in Ebenezer's red and blotched face—"but it's all for—ar—the best. These things are wisely ordered." He wrung the manufacturer's hand, or extended it to permit the other to do it. "And this is—ar—your nephew. An estimable young man, I doubt not, in that station which—that is—exactly so." He had caught his sister's eye. He must not go too far, so the glance said.

"Yes; he's in th' concern. He'll ha' a pot o' money some day, if he keeps wak', an' uses his opper-tunities."

"No doubt, no doubt." The captain glanced with infinite condescension upon the young man. "Great bore, though, money—ar—if I had only known—but it does not matter. Maria little knows the anxiety her property in Scotland gives me; third of a county nearly, not to say the other shooting place up in the North. You'll see those partridges are sent to

Mr. Emlott's house, Emily. But—ar—duty calls; and when duty calls—a soldier—ar—must obey."

"You've allus bin sodger's i' your family, an't you?" asked Ebenezer. He wished Ben, or Mrs. Bland, or Maria, would come to his rescue. But it seemed quite understood that these two were met expressly to become acquainted with one another. The rest sat and listened.

"To think of the amount of blood we've poured out—ar—to—ar—maintain the dignity of our ancestral descent! Blood—ar—shed to demonstrate blood. The amount—oh, really!" The captain's eyes looked upwards at a huge china bowl, of the willow pattern, resting upon a bracket. Evidently he was calculating whether it would have held it all.

"Dear me," said Ebenezer. It was not brilliant; but he could not, for the life of him, think of anything else. If not good English, it was not dialectic, and this was a distinct gain.

"And such blood as ours!" added his sister.

"Yes—ar—of course; that's the point. But I think we were talking about money. Money is a matter of business; there it differs widely—ar—from blood; and jointures have to be settled. We'll just turn into the next room, Mr. Emlott. Emily, you can come with us."

This was clever of the captain. It was clever to

close with the shrewd business man far away from his counting-house, where each desk was a moral support, and every ledger lent him a countenance. It was clever to bring him to a fixed disposition of his money when his native astuteness and acquired sagacity must have well-nigh deserted him. It was clever to fall upon the unusual expedient of facing the bridegroom elect, side by side, with the blooming and artless woman who was to be his wife; and who, of course, was utterly ignorant about such curious but, she supposed, necessary details. It was clever at such a juncture as this, too, to leave Ben and Maria together. The captain looked it on the surface but he was not a fool at bottom. He had not been knocked about the world, and played shuttlecock with for at least twenty years by the battledores of penury and debt, and all their attendant discomforts, without acquiring a certain education. His sharpness was that of the street *gamin*, and had been similarly learnt; but the cunning of this genus is proverbial.

As they went out, he turned round to Maria. "Don't be alarmed, my dear, about your property; your grandfather has left it safely tied up till you are twenty-three." "Only nine months off," thought Ben. "No one can touch it; not even myself, although I am a trustee. You won't mind my

offering the shooting occasionally to Mr. Emlott, eh?"

"I leave it all to you, uncle dear," said Maria affectionately.

It all sounded very natural to Ben, and it completely settled his intentions. He had no particular liking for Maria Bland—a slight *penchant*, nothing more. He had seen very few girls in his life, and of those he had seen, none had vouchsafed to recognize more than his existence, excepting the widow's daughter. It is just possible he might have deferred his proposal, and that that delay might have terminated in no proposal at all, but he had listened with all his ears to the conversation between Captain Hardy and his uncle, and everything tallied so exactly with all the past pretensions of the Blands, and the manners and bearing of the soldier, that he inwardly determined to place himself at Maria's feet now, while the chance offered. "Chance" was the word he mentally used. Sharp enough in the mill, he was no match for the widow and her brother. It never occurred to him that he had been left alone with the heiress, of deliberate purpose, that he might propose himself as Maria's husband. He was caught, wholly and completely caught.

"Shall I play for you, Mr. Ben? It will be so dull for you till the others come back again."

Ben blushed, and seemed incapable of response. He was a miserable talker at all times. Just now he did not know what to say. He was silent. Possibly even now he had not absolutely made up his mind.

"Or perhaps you would prefer to be left alone?" said the lady, in a tone of slight displeasure.

"No, don't do that," responded Ben.

"There's no one to stay with you but myself. I'm very sorry; but you'll have to put up with me," rejoined Maria, still preserving a shade of vexation.

"I should like to put up with you always," returned Ben, making the plunge at last.

"Whatever can you mean, Ben?" said Maria, simpering. She had never called him Ben before.

"Always, you know."

"I don't know at all."

"What I mean is, we might club our money together, and marry on it. I'm in love with you—that's what it is; quite deep, I am. I couldn't tell what was the matter with me till to-night—yesterday, I mean; and with your money and mine we should do, I think, don't you?" He took her hand in his; she left it there.

"Perhaps. You're sure you love me?" She looked up into his eyes.

"Positive. Your money's quite safe, of course. Your uncle said so just now."

"I leave all that to mamma and him. You heard what he said. Even he couldn't so much as lay a finger on it." If only Ben had known how strictly true this was!

"Then we're booked—that's about it, isn't it?" He put his arm round her waist, and her shower of ringlets fell upon his shoulder. It was a new coat.

"There's grease on 'em; that is, we'd better sit straight, or they'll catch us, won't they?" He ran his right hand anxiously over the black, glossy cloth. He would have liked to have gone to the mirror and inspected the spot, but it struck him that perhaps that would be ungracious—not quite the thing. He did not exactly know what it would be, or not be, but something told him he must not do it at such a moment as this.

"Let's have that waltz, Maria, in honour of the occasion."

Maria bent over her music-stand to find it, and Ben took the opportunity to wipe the shoulder of his new coat with his handkerchief. He then nearly twisted his neck out to see if there was any stain; but he could not get his head round far enough. He would look carefully when he got home. But he was rather uneasy for the rest of the evening.

After the music, Ben and Maria sat down again, and the young man managed to make love without detriment to his attire. As they sat, hand-in-hand, the others came in. It was noticeable that the manufacturer looked subdued, not to say serious.

"Hello! what's this?" cried the captain, sternly.

"Maria and I have made it up—we're engaged," said Ben, sheepishly.

"Engaged! Am I to understand, sir—ar—that you have clandestinely sought the affections—ar—of this young lady without consulting her mother—ar—her natural guardian, or her uncle—ar—the trustee of her property? Do you know, sir, that were she a ward of Chancery, you might be—ar—imprisoned for—for—abduction?" The officer frowned awfully.

"We've not—that is, she's not—I mean, I've not—abducted," said Ben, thoroughly frightened, and not quite positive as to the exact meaning of the term.

"There's *primâ facie* evidence that you were going to do it. Why, sir, I dare say you haven't a brass farthing to bless yourself with apart from what your uncle is pleased to allow you."

"I've three thousand four hundred pounds of my own," cried Ben boldly.

"It's true," said Ebenezer. "His mother left him

some money, and it's been accumulating for some years. It's quite that—maybe a pound or two over."

"Three thousand four hundred pounds!" Mrs. Bland's brother tried to say the words with all the scorn of which he was capable, but his eyes glistened. "Do you know anything of this, Emily?"

"Mr. Ben has never whispered a word to me on the subject," responded the widow, trying to look severe.

"Do you know, sir, how much Miss Bland will—ar—have when she is—ar—twenty-three?"

"No," said Ben. He looked as though he would like to have known, though.

"Come this way, sir. I must talk to you in private. This is indeed—ar—a serious matter."

The trustee of the Scotch estates looked decidedly fierce. The young man followed him out of the room, with a most uncomfortable feeling that he had been extremely presumptuous. Nevertheless, he was thoroughly determined to stick to Maria. It was evident the property was much larger than he had anticipated. He wished he had been more demonstrative to the young lady, and made her understand how deeply he was attached to her. Why had he not told her he should never know another happy hour if she did not abide by her

promise to be his wife. He had all but overreached himself by his stupid caution.

"Perhaps it's all for the best," said Mrs. Bland. "If they are really attached to one another, Ebenezer, I do not see how I can stand in the way of their happiness, especially under the circumstances," she added, blushing.

"Hadn't I better go to them?" suggested Ebenezer, whose face still wore a thoughtful expression.

"Oh no; quite unnecessary. Bold is very soft-hearted at the bottom. I feel sure he will give way when he knows that dear Maria's happiness is concerned in it. Naughty child! why didn't you take me into your confidence?" She pressed her daughter to her bosom with a tender and maternal solicitude that was quite touching. Even Ebenezer felt as he had never felt since he was a very little boy, and his mother was alive.

As he and Ben walked home that night, it was curious to note that both were somewhat reticent. Still there was a look of elation on their faces.

"You've done well, lad, depend on't. I hope you'll be grateful to your uncle for all he's done for you, I'm sure. I suppose you've to settle that money on Maria, eh?"

"Yes; but I'm to have control over Maria's property, you know." Ben grinned with satisfaction.

"We're to meet at Bentham's to-morrow at eleven. He said you was to be there at ten, and that you said you preferred him to Skillicorne."

"I'll never speak to Skillicorne as long as I live. 'Twas he as proposed to turn me out of the chapel, that he might curry favour with Geoffrey, the new heir. I'll ruin him afore I've done, see if I don't. You've to settle it all, have you?"

"Every farthing."

"Ay, I suppose so." The manufacturer said nothing about his own transactions with the captain; but his face appeared somewhat long, his nephew thought.

"Please, sir, there's a couple of partridges, with a card, from Captain Bold Hardy, and his compliments, and hopes they won't taste the worse for coming from the moors of Invermacrannan, as is Miss Bland's estates."

"I expected them, Tomkins," said Mr. Emlott, with dignity. Somehow he and Ben felt better as they took a look at the birds. They imparted an air of reality to the property. Not that there was any doubt in their minds on that point. But these two feathered creatures, with the card neatly tied to their legs, seemed like carrier pigeons bearing a message of confirmation to news that was as yet but partially suspected.

"One can a'most smell the heather," said Ben's uncle, putting his nose to them.

"And the Scotch air," added Ben, taking a turn.

"There'll be pleasant shooting for you some day."

"Ay; and we can send the grouse and the partridges to the market. I dare say a good thing can be made out of that."

Mr. Emlott looked benignantly on his nephew. "You's got Emlott blood i' your veins, whats'ever its quality may be. But I hope you'll be grateful for all I've done for you, I do. Good-night." And the two separated.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"My friend the Admiral was in fine wig and buckle on this occasion."—*The Wedding (Essays of Elia).*

MRS. BLAND was so pleased with her brother's conduct throughout that evening that had brought Ben to Maria's feet—we speak figuratively, of course, of this particular transaction—that she fetched forth a bottle of the celebrated vintage which had struck Ebenezer Emlott with such profound feelings of regard for the owner. She must have been in a high state of good-humour indeed, for she was a calculating woman, and there were only three bottles left. Two, she made up her mind, would be enough for the wedding feast, and her brother richly deserved the third.

"Gone off very pleasantly, on the whole," said the captain, with a slight chuckle, and stroking his moustache.

"A most profitable evening," responded Emily,

smilingly, laying an emphasis on the adjective. "It's all settled, of course?"

"Will be to-morrow morning. You can give me something to be going on with, Emily?"

Mrs. Bland was in a most sisterly frame. She looked into her purse. "I think I can manage it, by leaving the confectioner's bill till—till Ebenezer can pay it. You shall have three pounds, Bold."

The soldier nearly sobbed. His gratitude was unbounded. Oh, what strides he took as he pursued his way to the inn! At the Unicorn every one was most sedulous in caring for his wants. Indeed, the Unicorn was turned topsy-turvy by his advent. They could not have been more agitated had he been the "Lion" himself, who, after fighting for the crown for so lengthened a period, had at last come to pay his ancient enemy a visit. Evidently it was understood there should be a suspension of hostilities, for the "Lion" was treated with the utmost consideration. The Unicorn's friends in the bar-parlour were nowhere to-night.

"He only ordered beer," said the landlord afterwards; "but just to see him drink it, with his legs spread out, and his arms a-kimbo, and his spurs, and his epaulettes, and he six feet two inches out o' his stockings!"

"An' he never drank wi'out a toast. 'Lords

and ladies,' an' the rest on it, just as if he had bin at court," cried the landlady.

"An' snatches of songs 'bout fighting," put in the chambermaid.

"And so fierce-like," added the waiter.

"I wonder what was i' that parcel," said the landlady. "He never giv' it up to no one. He durna leave it i' his bedroom, but took it out i' th' evening."

"P'raps he left it somewheear," suggested the waiter.

"No, he browt it back wi' him, most careful-like."

"They'd be despatches," whispered the boots, who, having a brother who had run away from home and enlisted, was supposed to have special sources of information on military matters.

Every one concurred instantly. No one knew exactly what despatches were. There was something delightfully fearful in the idea. Boots was entreated to explain. Possibly his brother had not told him; he went out with a very knowing and expressive face, but he vouchsafed no answer. Evidently "despatches" was not a subject for ordinary gossip.

Day after day passed by, and still the captain lingered at the Unicorn. He still drank beer, and paid for it on the spot. He was a man whom even the landlord recognized as possessed of idiosyncrasies; not that that was the word he used. "He's some

queer ways o' his own," he had said. And he was queer. Whether it was bed, or dinner, or tobacco, or beer, it was all one; he persisted in paying the money down, there and then. His purse lay in his trousers-pocket. He had to stretch his legs out till his heels rested in the middle of the room; then lean against the chair's back, till his head dangled over the short but sheer precipice behind; then hitch up his arm till his shoulder seemed in imminent peril of dislocation. Then the dive was made, and when his hand emerged there was quite a quantity of money. It was mostly copper, with an occasional silver piece.

"How much did you say, sir?"

"Tuppence, sir."

"Ah, two pence. There's twopence half-penny. Not a word, sir." The landlord went back overwhelmed. He felt so grateful, he couldn't believe he had merely got a gratuity a size larger than the smallest coin in copper her Majesty is pleased to permit her face to be engraved upon. He was quite bewildered with the sense of his obligations.

Thus the days went by, and the "Lion" was still in huge favour. Everybody bowed to him, everybody wanted to wait upon him. This state of things culminated when he asked the landlord for another chest of drawers to be placed in his bedroom. He

must have that package under lock and key. The oldest cabinet in the house was carried thither; a piece of old English oak manufacture that had not been disturbed, probably, within a hundred years—certainly not within the memory of man. The key was a curious one, quite antique, with a large handle—a pocketful in itself. The captain appeared easier after this, and, in consequence, so was the landlord. "If them despatches be lost, we shall ha' Government down on us." The landlady forbade the chambermaids to go near the bedroom; she would dust it herself.

One night the captain came in late. He looked flustered, and yet elate. He took his candle and retired; but within five minutes the bell rang. It was the ring of a man who was in a state of mind not to be trifled with. The Unicorn had never trifled with Captain Bold Hardy since the first moment of his arrival. The landlord himself rushed upstairs.

"Is there a military tailor in the town?" The tone was loud, the door half-open.

"I don't know, sir. It's a quiet, peaceable place, you know," answered the palpitating attendant.

"Who's your best tailor?"

"Wallingford's is nearest; he's a good deal o' cloth i' th' winder."

"Send for Mr. Wallingford." The door was shut. The words were peremptorily imperious.

"He's accustomed to ordering his men about, eh? But they're strict i' the army," said the landlord when he had got down again.

Boots instantly ran to the tailor's private residence, and in less than five minutes that functionary appeared. He was a quiet-seeming man, but he looked disturbed. "Jist going to bed," he said. "What is it?"

"You're wanted upstairs." Once in the room the door was closed. The company below were silent and breathless. Nothing was said; all were waiting in an agony of suspense. The Unicorn's admirers in the bar-parlour were utterly neglected. They had to call at least six times before the barmaid attended; she might miss Mr. Wallingford and the explanation of this extraordinary and mysterious incident. Silence still reigned upstairs. A full hour passed, and the bar-parlour was empty, and it was time to close, and lock the door; but the tailor did not appear.

At last, when patience and suspense were alike exhausted, the man of cloth came downstairs.

"Well?" said the landlord. The rest gathered round.

"He'll never get out o' them, never. He'll ha' to sleep in 'em," said the tailor excitedly.

"What is it? Sleep in what?" Everybody asked the question.

Them trousers; and he'll ha' no circulation left in 'em i' the morning."

"In his trousers?"

"His legs, I said, man." The tailor went out without further parley. He was quite in a fluster.

Nature was decidedly propitious to the union between Mr. Emlott and Mrs. Bland on the one hand, and Maria and Ben on the other. Both took place together. It was a beautiful morning, with just enough of October sharpness in the air to quicken the step, and suggest to a man the advisability of doing with vigour and promptitude whatsoever avocation lay before him. Mr. Emlott, *ci-devant* deacon of Zion Chapel, was up early, and proceeded to his self-investiture of those new habits without which no bridegroom dare face the coming ceremonial, and which may be regarded as symbolic of that new habit of life which is to be his in so brief a space. It is an untried experience; unless being "tried on" may be regarded as destructive to the type.

The secret of the double wedding had not been kept with all the fidelity that Ebenezer Emlott might have desired. Sundry articles of dress had to be made for Mrs. Bland—she had not time to send to London for them—and the very hurriedness of the

order, and its character, opened the eyes of the young milliners. The preparations for the breakfast, too, could not but arouse suspicion on the part of the pastrycook. The cake alone would have ruined secrecy. Besides, there were servants—and besides, when did a projected wedding fail to be discovered? When the two bridegrooms reached the church, they were somewhat taken aback to find that already several groups of people were clustering about the door. When they entered the precincts of the sanctuary, they were still more dismayed when they saw all the central pews filled with quite a crowd of spectators, with expectancy in their faces. However, they walked as steadily as might be up the aisle, and took their positions by the rails. Ebenezer had not failed to hear some of the whispered remarks made by the onlookers.

"A camellia i' his button hole, too! Well, for sure!"

"He should ha' had a young turmit, set off wi' sprigs o' parsley."

Fortunately for Emlott, he now became forgotten for awhile, for a martial tread was heard. I am afraid the captain knew little by experience or observation of that quiet, religious step which marks the devout Sunday worshipper. His spurs jingled; his boots—oh, how they creaked! his sword smote every bench;

his eye was fixed sternly on one of the apostles—perhaps it was Judas—on the stained east window; and he charged the pulpit as if it were a battlement. Every glance was fastened upon him. He shook hands with the bridegroom, standing a yard and a half from that gentleman, and bowed, seemingly to the congregation, at a sharp angle from the hip. He was aware of his danger, evidently; nevertheless, Mr. Wallingford, the tailor, trembled with apprehension.

"They can't give, Sairey; there's no give in 'em," he whispered, in deepest agitation, to his wife.

The captain—we can't help calling him by this simple title—went into the vestry, came out, returned by the central aisle, looked annihilation on the font, and disappeared at the side door.

Several minutes elapsed, and then there was a flutter. Heads and necks were all craned in one direction. The elder bride came first, leaning with light but graceful pressure on the captain's arm. Having placed her by the pulpit stairs, the soldier once more returned to the door, and bore in, leaning if possible still more gracefully upon his arm, his niece Maria.

I dare not enter into a description of the respective dresses of the two brides. The lady reader, I trust, will be satisfied with the assurance that they were all that they ought to be. Mrs. Bland had, undoubtedly, good taste in such things. In one respect she was any-

thing but a "loud" woman. She was seldom, or never, overdressed; though, from her height and tendency to *embonpoint*, she could carry as much sail—to use the common expression—as most ladies. She was always habited according to the reigning fashion; and short as had been the time of her sojourn in Lackington, there was more than one milliner's shop which kept a steady look-out upon her goings out and comings in, as a means of knowing what was being worn, and how, up in the great centres of fashion at London and Paris. If Mrs. Bland were to leave Lackington there would be some to regret her, undoubtedly.

This much I will say, the two brides were intended to be effective by mutual contrast. From a male point of view Mrs. Bland was attired in a steel-coloured satin dress. Maria was arrayed in the chastest of white silk. The mother's bonnet—for she wore a bonnet—was white, with white flowers, and without any orange blossom. The daughter did not wear a bonnet, and the wreath was largely adorned with that richly-coloured blossom. Both wore veils of the lace which has made Honiton famous; and what with their own suggestions, and the skilled knowledge of a young lady who had just come to Messrs. Bloomer and Custance's from a London establishment somewhere in the neighbourhood of Oxford Street, the turn-out was altogether satisfactory to that portion of the

assembled onlookers who are believed to be alike interested in, and critical of, such matters.

"Is that Mrs. Bland, can you tell me?" asked a middle-aged man who had but just come in, from a woman who stood in the aisle for lack of a seat. He looked hot with walking, or perhaps running.

"No; but it was. She's Mrs. Emlott now."

"She lives, or did till to-day, at Westbourne Villa; hired a furnished house there for six months?"

"Ay, that's her. I don't know about the six months, though."

"Thank you." The stranger made his way back to the door, and from thence to the gate, where two carriages were standing. "Too late," he said to a constable who stood by the door of the foremost vehicle.

"It don't matter. He'll have to pay instead of her, that's all," returned the officer of the law.

"I should have been here a week ago, but I had business in Edinburgh, and thought I'd take the job on my way back." The stranger as he spoke took a big handkerchief from his pocket and mopped his forehead. He had evidently been running hard. "I must get back to Bath by to-morrow noon, if possible. I hope she won't prove awkward."

There was a great crowd at the gate. It seemed as if all Lackington had turned out to have a view of

the perjured deacon. Certain jeers and hootings betokened that the storm was commencing. The horses began to be restive—there was scarce room for them to stand, and the carpet that had been laid down had already been taken up and thrown aside.

Probably the captain did a turn for his brother-in-law which he did not wot of. There can be no doubt that as he followed close at the heels of the bridal pair, he cowed the multitude. The way was cleared.

"Might I trouble you—sorry to disturb you—but you are the late Mrs. Bland, if I may so say, are you not?" asked the stranger already referred to, stepping forward just at the moment Mrs. Emlott was being helped into the carriage by her husband.

The captain sprang forward. "Hallo, you, sir! How dare you? Bless me, it's you, is it? How d'ye do, sir?"

"Very well, thank you. Rather hot, though. Nearly missed you. I hope you're well, sir?" The stranger's hand was still on the door. "Mrs. Bland, I believe?" he added, bowing to the lady.

"Mrs. Emlott now," said the manufacturer grandly. "May I ask what this interruption means, sir? Most inconvenient. I can't be seen on business to-day—my wedding-day, sir."

"Hope it won't make you less happy, sir, to know

that your expenses will be increased by £96 10*s.* 5½*d.* —that's all. I've an order here to arrest your wife. Sheriff's officer—Messrs. Wellfitts, Pump Court, Bath. It's all proper; you can look at it. Best to keep it quiet now. I'll ride outside to the house. Jump in, ma'am—jump in, sir."

He pushed them in, and closed the door, and sprang on the box.

It was all done so quietly that not even had the captain and Ben and Maria caught the exact facts of the case. That something unpleasant had happened they knew, for they had seen the perturbed expression on the faces of both Mr. and Mrs. Emlott as they drove off. Especially had the bridegroom looked discomposed.

"It's the middle-aged gentleman. How changed! I scarcely knew him without his spectacles. What did he say?" the captain asked of Mr. Bentham, as he and that gentleman were being bowled along in the third carriage.

"I heard the words 'Sheriff' and 'Wellfitt,' and ninety-six pounds something," said the lawyer, who was sharp-eared. "I fancy it's something disagreeable." Mr. Bentham was sitting by the bride's brother. He thought it best to say no more.

"Are you sure?" cried the captain, whose cadaverous face had suddenly become livid with fear. "Did he say 'Wellfitt'?"

"Yes, that was the name," said the lawyer, looking astonished.

"I've forgotten my—my—umbrella—that is, my handkerchief:" he was wiping his forehead with it. "Stop, driver!" he said, putting his head out of the window. "I'll be back in no time, of course; but don't—don't wait for me. I might be kept a few minutes."

He was off before a word could be said. We may add here that he was never seen again that day, nor for many a long day, in Lackington. Whether he believed that he, too, was to be arrested, not having yet paid for his new military suit, or that that same suit was to be taken from him, deponent sayeth not. Enough that he had fled.

When Ben reached Westbourne Villa, there was an altercation going on. His uncle was in a towering passion. Mrs. Bland was still hanging on his arm, trying to get him into the house.

"Unpaid debts! Why, Mrs. Bland is well off. Her daughter is possessed of large estates in Scotland; it's in the south."

"In the county of Ayre, I suspect, isn't it?" said the man, grinning at his joke.

"Probably; I am not sure. Then there's a place in the north, isn't there, Emily? Good shooting, where them partridges came from. Invermacrannan —that's the name, isn't it?"

Mrs. Emlott nodded. She looked uncomfortable, but not particularly unhappy.

"In the islands—Skye is the name, isn't it." The man grinned the more as he grew the more facetious.

"Possibly." The manufacturer was very dense where a joke was concerned.

Before Mr. and Mrs. Emlott started on their tour, the former had paid away £96 10*s.* 5½*d.*, not to mention other sundries, which brought the entire sum to something over a hundred pounds. He looked intensely dejected, and forgot to say good-bye to his step-daughter and nephew.

CHAPTER XIX.

"But Heaven was gracious; yet a little while,
And this survivor . . . . . .
. . . . . and all his inward hoard
Of unsunn'd griefs too many and too keen,
Was overcome with unexpected sleep,
In one blest moment."

The Excursion.

If we could imagine a man's life, with all its varied and multiform experiences, to be laid out on a large broad-sheet, we should find that, as in a newspaper the births, deaths, and marriages are set in the same column, so some of his most happy and grievous dispensations would be found side by side.

When Johnnie and Geoffrey reached home, their father was dead.

But he had not died without making his sign. Jane knew almost as much in relation to her husband's life in London, and the troubles of his first marriage, as did Geoffrey. She had waited for this with wonderful patience, and she was quite

prepared for her own course of action when the mystery should be disclosed. Whatever of sadness might tinge the relation—and it must be sad to have embittered so many years of his life—she would hear it cheerfully, and do her best, the best that God would enable her, to soothe the remaining days that might be theirs to spend together. That he had sinned as well as sorrowed, she was sure. Sheer grief could not work such ruin as this.

But there are trespasses and trespasses, and Jane had never faltered in the one conviction that that which had been laid to her husband's charge had not been done. It is possible that many another in Jane's position, and with her opportunities of judging of Ralph's character—its biases, and its sensitiveness—would have arrived at the same conclusion; but very few upon such a delicate analysis would have founded such a firm and abiding conviction. Had Jane been more a woman of the world, it might have been that she had been less sure. There is this great mystery about single and notable transgressions, transgressions that have laid their hands heavily upon a man's future, and made him the talk of his fellows. The characteristic weakness that should lead to such a crime has lain hitherto unsuspected. It is even a question whether the act was characteristic at all.

Has it not rather been the outcome of a sudden inward tempest, which has swept for the moment all the sum of his qualities, good, bad, and indifferent alike, before it? Abnormal passion has stormed and commanded every moral bulwark of his soul. At that instant he is not himself, but another. He is himself in that he is responsible, another in that the Evil One is so absolutely master of his house of clay that he seems to be living, breathing, thinking, doing, by substitution. It is then he acts as he never acted before, and never will, God helping him, afterwards. It is then the great contradiction takes place. That to which his nature has the most instinctive repulsion will be entertained; and if entertainment resolve itself into an action, he will rob his after life of its peace and tranquillity.

But Jane knew little of such mysterious inconsistencies. She had through all her days been an absorbed woman; not absorbed in self—never a more purely unselfish woman than she—but in the three or four human beings whom God and nature had associated with her life. Her husband was one of these; and having studied his character to meet its needs, she knew that the sin laid against him was not his. This it was, being ignorant of such contradictions, that made her indignant; so jealously

wrathful, that even Geoffrey and Johnnie had lain under her peculiar displeasure.

There was not a man or woman in Lackington, not even excepting Ebenezer Emlott, who believed that Ralph Lexley was one with a natural bias to such a crime. Nevertheless, they all believed him guilty of it. Jane forgave her children, but in her heart she never forgave Lackington. The chapel, the minister, and the people, they were never to her what they had been. And to that extent her life was somewhat embittered afterwards.

"Dr. Garfitt never gave me a distinct hope. I have felt all along that he despaired of your father's life," said Jane, the evening of the day of her children's return.

"But he had made steady progress, had he not?" asked Geoffrey.

"Yes; but it was the progress the doctor dreaded. He knew Ralph's acute susceptibilities, especially to mental pain, and several times when I spoke hopefully of his returning consciousness, he laid his hand on my arm. 'I am afraid of that; he will begin to think. Read to him, talk to him, engage his attention; and, without fatiguing him, hinder his thoughts from dwelling too long upon one subject. You can judge by his countenance whether or no his mind is becoming overcast with troublous thoughts. I think,'

he said, 'that he must have heard of that meeting which took place the evening of his attack.'"

"And had he?" said Johnnie eagerly.

"Yes," replied his mother. She spoke in a low, steady voice, and her face was still—too steady, too still. "Your uncle told him of it in the afternoon. I questioned Ralph about it, and managed to get at the truth. Indeed, I learnt all—all that was necessary to be told, before he died—chiefly from little broken, detached words, which I pieced together for myself; and partly from a few lines he endeavoured, with partial success, to write, as he sate up in bed. He had been very restless all day. All my efforts to lull his mind into forgetfulness were vain. He became altogether unmanageable; and the doctor not being there, I gave way. He struggled to sit up, and so I was compelled to raise him. Then he beckoned for paper, and began to trace words with his left hand. Through that and his stuttered words, I learnt everything." Jane went out of the room. She had controlled herself marvellously since her sons were home again, but just now she must give way; and she went that she might be alone. Johnnie, when he would fain go and look upon his father, and there suppress the wildness of his own sorrow, found himself forestalled. His mother was sitting by the bed.

"He died happy; he must have done," he said, as he gazed on his father's cold, but placid face.

Jane's eyes flashed quick fire. "Happy! Why not?" She turned so sternly that Johnnie retreated a step in sheer dismay. But she instantly subsided. "A look of peace never left him after I had laid him back upon the bed. Even when he became all unconscious again, his face had quite a different expression from that which had rested there before. Yes, he died happy, and right has prevailed. I should never have known any peace again, if his happiness had begun only after death. It would have looked as though God were falling back upon heavenly happiness to make up for the failures of His earthly purposes. But that peaceful smile disproves any such seeming infidelity. His soul is with God, and therefore it must needs be glad. But his body, never was it more of the earth, earthy than now; and yet his face wears a smile." She looked stedfastly upon it—the smile—and kissed it.

Johnnie went out. He was himself in a bewilderment of sorrow; but he felt just then that it was all his own. He scarcely knew what this sorrow of Jane's was. They were both grieving for the same dead one, and yet, somehow, it was all different.

"Shall I ask uncle to the funeral?" said Geoffrey, who had taken everything in hand.

"You have no uncle; at least, I have no brother," she replied firmly.

Geoffrey and Johnnie were as unwilling as their mother that Ebenezer Emlott should be present, but the question had had to be asked nevertheless.

"I have abjured my relationship. You must act as you think right. Henceforward to me he is dead. I shall never see him again."

"Mother, this frame will make you ill. You can't go on much longer in this way." Geoffrey might well say so, for Jane was all but worn to a skeleton, and her face was as white as that of the corpse upstairs. Only she lacked its quiet repose.

"Illness is often put down to overtaxed strength when in reality it is but a cowardly want of self-suppression. Half the ladies who faint could avoid fainting by a mere deliberate effort of will. If they said, 'I will not faint,' they would not. I will not be ill. People would say it was the story that had done it, not the nursing."

"Perhaps a few would," said Geoffrey meditatively.

"All would; even Mr. Juggins. I will not be ill."

"God helping you," said Johnnie.

Jane stared defiantly at her eldest son. He met her look this time with one of quiet intrepidity. She seemed abashed. Suddenly the pent-up tears flowed forth; she fell rather than sat down, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Yes, God helping me," was all she said.

The reader must not suppose from this that Jane Lexley became all at once a softened woman. It was years before she forgave Lackington its readiness to believe the charge laid against her husband. Even when she was enabled to see how much cause they had for so doing, she did not forgive them instantly. And in her heart of hearts she scarcely forgave her brother. At least they never met of purpose, and she died without a single renewal of those brotherly and sisterly relations which once had bound them so closely one to the other. I will not say that she did not forgive him the evil he had worked her husband, but she refused ever to forget it, and that made reconciliation impossible.

It may be that many of my readers, should they ever prove many, may feel disappointed in Jane Lexley. They would have been content with this hardness developed in her to a certain stage ; say to that burst of tears, the consequence of her own son's rebuke. But after that she must take the whole world into her embrace, Ebenezer included, and be an example of what Christians should be, rather than what they are. I think that better moral lessons are taught from real than imaginary pictures. I have tried to delineate people as I have met them—especially good people ; and if any one of that class of readers to whom I

have referred should close this book with the feeling that Jane was not a good woman, I have indeed failed in my intention. That she was a woman who, through past training and circumstance, developed into an imperfect type of what a Christian woman—or man, for the matter of that—should be, is strictly true. But the perfect model I have never yet seen except in books, and I believe no man will see, not even a Plymouth Brother, until the new dispensation hath set in.

CHAPTER XX.

"Our eyes do hate the dire aspect
Of cruel wounds plough'd up with neighbours' swords."
King Richard II.

THE news that Johnnie was heir to Lexley Grange fell upon Lackington like a thunder-clap. At first no one believed it; and as there was no will, they looked for Geoffrey to take possession of the property. But day after day passed by, and he gave no sign of such an intention. Then a report got abroad that the two had made some mutual and secret agreement; but this died a sudden death when the facts came out. They might have been known earlier but for Jane. She stood firmly on her old ground. The scandal must be treated with the contempt it deserved. To vouchsafe a single explanation was to excuse the folks around and about them for having set it afloat. No; they must just live on as if nothing had occurred to disturb their lives. Her pride would then be satisfied, and the world would be rebuked.

Both Johnnie and Geoffrey fell in with her wishes. But Skillicorne had to be seen in the way of business, and it was impossible but that to him all the facts and data should be forthcoming. Through him it was known after a while that somebody or other had pitched upon a marc's nest, and of course it was as readily decided that Ebenezer Emlott was the discoverer.

This fact was a pleasant fact. It was so nice to have some one to blame for a mistake which if they had not originated, they had accepted as no mistake at all, but as a solid and substantial and sad reality. It was curious to note how quickly everybody found out that he and she had had doubts about the statement from the very first. It was surprising to learn that, after all, not more than three or four people in the whole town had really given credence to the story; and of these, three at least denied that they had done any such thing. The older folk said that when the young folk had grown as old as they, they would learn not to believe implicitly every idle rumour that was abroad. The younger declared that if their elders had not uttered such mysterious ejaculations as "I knew how it would be!" or "Ah, it's a wicked world!" or "One can't be surprised at anything when one's lived as long as I have lived!" they would have forgotten the scandal within twenty-four hours. The women

met over their dish of tea, and never a one of them blushed as they all expressed their contempt for the tendency the men have for congregating together over the bar of the public-house to spice their beer with lies of this kind. The men, as they smoked their pipes in the tap-room, agreed without a dissentient voice that these things would never be but for the women. Nevertheless, women and men, and young and old, united with one voice in condemnation of Ebenezer Emlott. Each might accuse the other of spreading it, but he it was who had given birth to the scandal, and he was Mr. Lexley's own brother-in-law. Ralph Lexley had been killed by a lie, and the liar was the manufacturer. On his head they emptied, one and all, the vials of their wrath, and conscience stung none.

Everybody who had the right, by excuse or privilege, called upon the Lexleys. Mothers with those marriageable daughters who had been warned so carefully only to bow to Johnnie if they met casually in the street, brought the whole tribe at their heels, and offered him the picking and choosing of them : even the flower of the flock was not withheld. The mothers nearly embraced him ; the daughters squeezed his hand ; the flower of the flock asked him why he had not called for—oh, such a long time ! The more they made a show of congratulation, the more icy

and haughty grew Jane. Those who never called at all, or who, calling, spoke naturally as if nothing had occurred, from them she made or continued her after friendships—to none else.

But there was a surprise in store for all these folks which utterly took the breath out of them. As one man following after another in the lane treadeth out his footprints, so this new story trod out the old. An heiress—a full-grown heiresss—to Mr. Grewby, of Grewby Park, existed. At first it was but a whisper; but the storm is often heralded by the faintest rustle of the forest leaves, and by-and-by this was a tempest indeed.

Almost immediately after his return home, and while yet in the depths of his sorrow, Geoffrey had written to Mr. Grewby to ask him to appoint an hour of meeting at the Park when he might set before him certain statements which, however distressful to himself, he (Geoffrey) felt confident he would prefer to become acquainted with. Having related them, Geoffrey said he should leave the whole matter in Mr. Grewby's hands, knowing that the interests of Miss Marnott were safe there. He would wish Mr. Haddock, however, to be present, as her uncle and guardian.

Mr. Grewby replied within an hour, and the letter was brought by the steward. He said that

he had not the faintest idea to what matter Mr. Geoffrey Lexley alluded; but his letter was written with such a serious air that he would be obliged if Geoffrey would at once come over to the Park, if in his present trouble he felt equal to the effort. If he understood the note rightly, the business was of vital consequence either to himself or Miss Marnott. She had grown so in his affections that he might add that anything that might affect her would just as nearly affect himself. He only trusted that the matter which Geoffrey alluded to might not rob him of the presence of one who had done more already for his declining years than he had thought it in the power of human being, under God, to do.

Geoffrey laid the whole of the facts already known to the reader before Mr. Haddock. His astonishment, and that of his wife, will be readily imagined. It was determined that the whole matter should be kept a secret. Johnnie was not to go with them—that the two brothers had agreed upon. It would look as if Johnnie were securing for his future wife a fortune before he proposed himself to her. Indeed, this matter of Cécile's new position had become a great trouble to the heir of the Lexleys. When first Gip had related the facts he had not realized them. The thought that he might once again lay claim to Cécile herself had been so overwhelming

in its sweetness that all other reflections at that time had been impossible. Slowly there grew up in his heart a fact that, as it gathered strength, shaped itself into a thick and wide barrier between his affection for Cécile and his right to claim her. I speak of claim with intention; for Johnnie, ever since he had met Cécile in the apple orchard, knew that he was as loved as he was loving. Even now, amid all these welcome recognitions of his true position, he felt that a cloud was gathering over the horizon of his life, which might burst over his head and sweep away his bright day-dreams of happiness beyond all recall.

Mr. Grewby met Geoffrey and Mr. Haddock with genial kindness; but he, too, looked serious. They were in the library, and Geoffrey held several papers in his hand.

"Would you like Cécile to be present, Mr. Haddock?" His voice quivered slightly. "It will be hard to lose her." This, evidently, was the only thought in the old man's mind.

"I think it will be better not. In case the statements set forth by Mr. Lexley should lack sufficient foundation, it will be well that my niece should remain unaware that they had been declared." Mr. Grewby bowed assent.

Geoffrey and the parson had both agreed that the conversation should be brief.

"I trust you will excuse me asking several pointed questions, Mr. Grewby. The issues must be my warrant for the liberty. The statements I have to make concern yourself quite as nearly as Miss Marnott. You had an elder brother—Lieutenant Grewby?"

The face of the owner of Grewby Park changed to sadness. "I should not have been here had he lived."

"He made somewhat frequent visits to London, I think?"

"Yes. We had a house there, or rather a suite of rooms. My sister was under the constant care of a French doctor, distinguished for his treatment of the specific disease from which she suffered."

"Did you ever hear any rumour concerning a marriage said to have been contracted by him?"

"Never." The old man stared at them in great bewilderment, but he spoke firmly.

"Nevertheless he did marry—a young lady." Geoffrey understood Mr. Grewby. He saw fencing was unneeded. It was not as if he were young, or as if he had children of his own whose lives would be pinched and narrowed by a sudden downfall from high prosperity. This man was alone, and well-nigh in his grave. Besides they were not come to rifle him of his proprety—only to provide him with an heir to the same.

"Geordie married!" He gasped for breath. "Where is your proof?"

Then Geoffrey set the papers in order on the table, and Mr. Grewby, having put his spectacles on, looked at them carefully. No one said a word. He gave each a long and careful scrutiny. Then his eyes dimmed with tear-drops, and he could see no longer.

"Married, and I not to know! This was hard. She may have died in poverty—perhaps starved to death, eh, sir?" he said sternly.

"No; she died, within two or three days after her husband's death, in giving birth to her child."

"Her child—Geordie's child? Had Geordie a child?" he eagerly questioned.

"Yes, a daughter."

"And she died, of course?" The old man's words were bitter. How lone he was! First his father had died, then his sister, then Geordie, then Jack Milton. Everybody had died. Minnie was the only relic left him of the past, and even she was related to him only by the ties of a long bygone friendship. Now he found he had had a sister—the wife of his brother. But she also was dead. The child was dead, too. God, it seemed, would have it so.

"No; she lived—lived to grow up. She lives now."

"God, I thank Thee!" He bowed his head reverently. "Tell me, where is she?"

"I said this business concerned the interests of two people—yourself and"—Geoffrey saw the old man's eye kindling with a wild light—"and Miss Marnott. Your brother and his wife took the name of Marnott. On this point and on the identity of their child I can furnish you with every reasonable proof. I have the certificate of her birth, and a letter of your brother's commending his wife and her unborn child to your care. He said he could trust you to do them right."

"You mean to say that—that—— Oh, sir, don't play with an old and lonesome man. You mean —say what you mean."

"Your own niece—your brother's child, is now under your roof—Cécile Marnott, more rightly Cécile Grewby."

The old man fairly sobbed. "I have prayed for much, but not so much as this. Blessed be God, for He is good! The word is, 'Seek, and thou shalt find.' I have not even to seek: she is here. God hath seen my feeble years; and though I would have dragged my tottering feet to the furthest limits of the earth to bring her home, He hath Himself brought her to me, that my few remaining days may be blessed. And they shall be blessed."

"'At eventide there shall be light,'" whispered the parson.

"Ay—light indeed. Gentlemen, I will go and fetch my—niece—Geordie's child." He paused at the door. "I have blessed the Giver. It will be no despite to Him that I bless the means. My blessing—an old man's blessing—be upon you, sirs." He went out; but, for an old man, his step was light.

We need not enter into details of which the reader is aware. Besides all real difficulties in deciding the matter had been removed. Geoffrey, at least, could lay his hand on each connecting link. Sufficient to say that, within a few days, the chain of evidence was completed. The registers had been again visited; Kilvert, and the priest, and Mrs. Grandperrot seen, the letter of the lieutenant read. There was, I say, no link wanting, and Cécile was announced heiress of the Grewby estates.

Geoffrey, Mr. Grewby, and Mr. Haddock had made the journey to London together. "I suppose it is necessary," said the old man, with quivering lips, "that I seek the establishment of these facts; but"—and he almost trembled—"suppose we found some link wanting?" But they comforted him with fresh assurances of proof, and he went with them joyously. He seemed to gather strength with every stage of their journey. When they reached London

he was hale and hearty, and in his eagerness would have outstripped the energies of both his companions.

Geoffrey was perfectly willing to do his part by Cécile, but somebody else had a foremost place in his thoughts. He took the other two with him to the Pension, making Mrs. Grandperrot a convenient excuse for so doing. Of course they must see her, and the place where Mrs. Kilvert had died; the very street, too, in which the Grewbys' house had stood. No communication had passed between him and Louise since his return to Lackington. He had written one short letter, but it was to her mother, and it was to inform her of his father's death. He added that he hoped to see them very shortly, and on this Louise had lived; and for a while her affection had thrived wonderfully on such scant allowance. For material meat is not the only food that can be reduced to an essence; and there was a good deal in that one short sentence of Geoffrey's—that he would come again, and shortly. Still, the extract of meat must be partaken of again and again, like all other fare. The days passed away, and Louise grew hungry; by-and-by, very hungry.

She began to despond. She remembered how short their acquaintance had been—how still shorter their friendship; and as for their love, could it not be concentrated in one brief but absorbing moment

of quick happiness? We are never the same after we have passed through such a scene as that which Geoffrey and Louise passed through when they parted. We are not as we were before. The lightning flash is very bright, but it leaves the sky darker than it was ere the flash came—at least, our eyes make us think so. And after Geoffrey was gone, it seemed to Louise that her life was infinitely more dreary than heretofore. She pined for more words from Geoffrey's lips, and more light from his eyes; and in pining she began to grow sad, and her heart gradually got steeped in the thought that he had forgotten her, and would not come to her again.

"Louise!"

Geoffrey had left the gentlemen with Mrs. Grandperrot, and was hastening upstairs to the drawing-room, like one who felt and knew that he was at home, and could take familiarities which other casual guests could not. He met Louise at the door. He well-nigh pushed her back again into the room.

He held her hand. "Had you forgotten me?" His eyes sparkled with joy at seeing her again.

"No," she said, simply. "Had you forgotten me?"

"No, for I am here. Will you be my wife?"

"Yes. Oh, I am so glad!" she whispered.

He took her into his arms in a way peculiar to

lovers ; and then after a moment or two, she gently disengaged herself from his clasp, and they sat down and had such a fill of happiness as only comes once in a lifetime, and to some lives—never.

And then Geoffrey unbosomed himself, and told her with slight quakings of heart—what cowards those fellows are !—of Cécile Marnott, and almost all that had passed between her and himself, and how he had never loved her as he loved Louise ; and Louise pouted ever so little, and wanted him to tell her exactly how much more he loved her than he had loved Cécile ; and after a time she was persuaded that between the two loves there was a great chasm, and that comparison was out of the question, Gipsy—she had already learnt the name—loved her so much more. Then she made friends again. How delicious those little quarrels are ! how soon they begin ! What in the world is equal to that "making it up again" that follows ?

CHAPTER XXI.

"All is well ended, if this suit be won."
All's Well that Ends Well.

JOHNNIE still held aloof from Cécile, and at first she could not tell why; and then the truth flashed upon her, and she did not know what she should do. She had already done that the recollection of which covered her with maidenly confusion. All the same she knew that, if the circumstances were to come over again, she would do it a second time. But this was not likely; nay, it was impossible it should be; and she was in a great mental strait. Finally, she felt she could do nothing, and so thinking, she became restless and unhappy. She was even more miserable than she had ever been before. Then a certain hopelessness in the surroundings of her affection and his had tended in itself to help her to endure all that was laid upon her. Now nothing was hopeless, saving this speaking of a single word, which should bring them together—this removal of one little but

delicate barrier which the sensitive nature of her love had set up. But she had now learnt, what we all have to learn in bitter surprise, that a little obstacle is often a great obstacle, and that a mole-hill may, after all, be scaled less easily than a mountain.

Mr. Grewby saw that something was wrong. She had already told him part of her tale. They had become as father and daughter, and the daughter had gone to her father with her trouble. That was before she was discovered to be his niece. He had besought her to be his adopted child, and to take the charge of Minnie as a lifelong obligation. Then she had told him of a possible marriage with Johnnie Lexley. Nothing more had been said, but Mr. Grewby had not forgotten what had been revealed to him. He was sorry, very sorry, that Cécile stood in a sense engaged to young Lexley. Like everybody else, he took the story of his birth to be true; and, though not a man of the world, he knew the social difficulties that would stand in the way of such an alliance, and the still greater difficulties that would follow it. But for the present he had kept these things to himself.

As for Johnnie, he spent most of his spare time with Isaac Curling. That worthy was delighted to be with the young squire. His delight at the happy *dénouement* of the scandal was unbounded. He was

not aware, happily for his own peace of mind, that he had been, in fact, the originator of all these troubles. Long afterwards he heard the truth, but by that time the truth had no power to sting.

One day, soon after their reunion, Johnnie and Isaac fell talking about the scandal. The Kilverts were mentioned.

"Mrs. Kilvert wrote me a letter to say she knew all I wanted to know, and would tell it me if I could choose a place and time of meeting that would enable her to be unseen by any of the Lackington people. She might be recognized by some of those who were most immediately concerned in the matter about which we had a mutual interest, she said. I suggested the churchyard, and seven o'clock. But it would not do; it wasn't safe, she said. So I fixed for the church itself, and ten o'clock. Her husband was to come with her. I've a key of my own for the vestry door."

"And what did she tell you?"

"Just nothing. She wanted to see how much I knew, that was all; and before I saw the game she was playing, I had let out that I had got hold of nothing to speak of. She was a bit frightened when I told her I had written to the clerk of the church in Bristol Street. But she took me in clean, there. I mentioned your name."

"My name?" said Johnnie, astonished.

"Yes; I forgot you did not know. They sent me a copy of your father's marriage-lines. They said that was the only entry they could find that spoke of Lackington. When I mentioned that, Mrs. Kilvert pretended to be quite taken aback, and said I had got hold of the leading clue, and that I knew nearly as much as she did. That throwed me clean off the line. I never thought no more 'bout th' Grewbys. Then she palavered me a bit. There was one matter as she thought, but wasn't positive, would help me. She would keep it for the present, only on no account was I to lose sight o' Mrs. Banyer. Eh, but she fooled me rarely!" he said, laughing.

"Was Mr. Kilvert present?"

"In th' vestry. We was in the aisle by th' Grewby monument. He's drinking hisself to death, I'm feart, down at th' farm."

"I can't make out how Uncle Ebenezer got hold of his story."

"Nor I. He knowed all about it, when I spoke to him." Isaac did not like to admit that he himself had been misled by the certificate. Of course he did not know that Mr. Emlott had befooled him too, as well as Mrs. Kilvert. Then Isaac hesitated a little, and said, "When shall you be married, Mr. John?"

"I don't know—probably never." Johnnie flushed.

"Then it's your doing, not Miss Cécile's," the genealogist replied decisively.

"Perhaps. But Miss Grewby is a great heiress, Isaac; and I do not wish to bind her to an old half-contract made when she was but a governess."

"Would you like her to think that was the reason as you didn't speak?" asked Ike reproachfully.

"Not exactly as I said it. But I dare say she knows the truth; she must feel the difference."

"She was willing to ha' you, when you was thought to be what you—was thought to be," replied his companion.

"Yes; she was noble as herself could be, then."

"Then you're bound to ax her yourself this time. It's your duty if you love her. Sensibility is a good thing, I dare say, Mr. John; but when it comes to selfishness, it's time to drop it, if you'll excuse me saying so."

"Selfish? How?"

"You's destroying her happiness for a mere highty-flighty notion of what's becoming to your own pride. Besides, it's a degrading o' love to the level o' material things, sich as silver and gold, and land, and sich-like, which is all nowt alongside o' true love. You're not dealing right by Miss Cécile, Mr. John," said Isaac doggedly.

This was a phase of the question which had not

occurred to Johnnie before. Unless he spoke, he and Cécile would never be married. It was his turn now, so Isaac had said, and he felt they were words of right. If the position had been reversed, and he had been so exalted rather than Cécile, would that have interfered with his declaration of fealty and love? He flouted the notion with very scorn. And why should he not ask her to be his wife as things were? It was not as if he himself were poor, and without parentage. He was comparatively rich, and his birth and lineage were equal to hers. Why did he, then, thus dally with his happiness? The fact was—and Johnnie did not conceal it from himself—he was somewhat disappointed. It had been a sweet experience, this love for Cécile Marnott, the governess, though so much pain had been mingled with it. Her more lowly condition had seemed best to befit their attachment and to fulfil his hopes. To lift her out of her troubles at Mrs. Bland's; to rescue her from the scarce-concealed insults of Maria; to change her indigence for plenty; to make her life happy and blessed out of very contrast with her former sorrows; to take her to himself and cherish her so that she should only think of the past that it might enhance the present—all this he had dreamt about for months; this had gilded all his purpose, this had illumined his every plan.

Now, if they married, he must go to her home; she could not come to him. Now, she lived in a great house, with a retinue of servants, with the means for surrounding herself with luxury on every hand, with a park-land to wander in, with so much wealth that let him bring what he would, he must seem himself a dependant upon her bounty, and his land but an appendage to her estate. Now, and before he could say a word of love to her, she was rid of her griefs, and lifted above all abuse. They who once disdained must now cringe, and the harassments of straitened circumstances might no more disturb her heart. All this had come to her without his assistance. He had to stand and look on, when he had hoped to do everything. He was but a beholder, and he had yearned to be the doer. This was a disappointment. So he had said, "If I must live in her home, let her come to me. Were she coming to my home, the home that I would have made for her, then I would have gone to her. Our, position is reversed; let her, therefore, come to me."

There was pride in this, as well as disappointment. And when Isaac said he was elevating material wealth above the heart's treasure of love, and when he further added that he, Mr. John, was selfish—inasmuch as he was neglecting Cécile's happiness—for she loved him—out of mere regard

to a sensitive and false appreciation of changed circumstance—then Johnnie began to ponder, and a new light broke in, and he became ashamed of himself, and he determined to see Cécile immediately.

His opportunity came the very next day. It was a Saturday afternoon, and he met her on her way home to the Haddocks; for still as yet she went "home" from the Park, which was to be hers, to the parsonage where her uncle and aunt lived, as though that were her real dwelling-place. It was no accidental meeting on Johnnie's part. He had been waiting by the park-gate for an hour. He might have gone to the house, and made his suit in the gilded drawing-room; or he might have caught her in the park, and reminded her of his love under one of those noble beeches, whose leaves yet lingered as though to shelter a pair of belated lovers, who had let summer and autumn decline, and neglected to make themselves happy. But somehow, being prospectively hers, he would not speak there; so he waited for his love upon the road.

Johnnie saw at once that Cécile was pale. It was as well he saw her first, lest he had been deceived, for when she raised her eyes, a rich crimson mounted to her cheeks.

"I have been waiting for you, Cécile. I will not call you Miss Grewby, although circumstances are so changed."

"They are not changed to me," said Cécile, in the same words she had used in the orchard, when it was Johnnie's altered fortune they were referring to. "I am still Cécile Marnott to those who care to find it out."

"I could not ask you to be my wife in the orchard because I was so degraded, and now I feel as if I could not ask you because you are so exalted."

"There was no change to me when you spoke in the orchard. There is no change now," Cécile replied, in a quiet, low tone. "What have we to do with those things?" She spoke in reproach.

"I was wrong to wait. Will you be my wife now?" Her gentle rebuke had sunk deep.

"Yes; but——"

"But what, Cecile?"

"I wish you had come before." It was said softly, and in a whisper. But it was not needed she should add more. There was a tear in her eye, and Johnnie knew that Cécile had suffered much while he had delayed to come to her. His pride had given her pain.

"Can you—will you forgive me, darling?" His arm was round her waist, and her head on his shoulder, although it was a public thoroughfare. But one can't be always thinking of the public.

"I'm afraid I must." Then they both laughed. What sunshiny laughter it was!

Then they remembered they had not met since the death of Johnnie's father, and they spoke of it, quietly and soberly, as they slowly walked along the smooth pathway, arm-in-arm. Then again they recurred to themselves, and it was wonderful how easy it was to talk of past misunderstandings in the glow of a present that found them altogether agreed that they would be one until death, and one after, for the matter of that. It was a bleak November afternoon, but they gave no heed to that; they were basking in May, and doubtless saw daisies and buttercups on either side. The late year's fog was rising over the stream below, and soon even the bare woods would be enshrouded in a thick, grey mantle of mist. But all the darkness was passed away from their hearts, and just then they could see not even the smallest vapour to obscure the horizon of their lives. They were happy. Arm-in-arm did not please them enough—neither Johnnie nor yet Cécile; it must be hand-in-hand, and it was thus they pursued their way—their way to-day, and their way to the end.

"I will show you something, Cécile," Johnnie said, and he led her down the steep, into the churchyard, and under the yews, and into the church, and to the vizarded knight, and the child-angel.

"What a sweet face she has!" said Cécile, leaning on Johnnie's shoulder as he bent down.

"She was a Grewby," said her lover, softly.

"I had forgotten; that is, I had not realized it yet. It is all so new to me."

"Her name was Cecilia Grewby. I and Isaac only found it out last week. We could not be sure whether 'C' stood for Catherine or Cecilia; but we have discovered a 'Syssot Grewby' of the same date, and that was the then pet name for Cecilia. Sit down. I will tell you what this child-angel, this Cécile Grewby, has been to me before I saw you, and even since." Then Johnnie told his tale, and the shades began to fall upon them, and the sombre but softened light of the painted windows began to fade out, and the evening came down.

"I always looked to her as living, this little child that has been so much to me, and she does live—for are you not by my side?"

"Shall I be as much to you as she has been?" Cécile almost felt jealous of this child-angel, this other Cécile.

"You cannot put it so. You are both one."

Then they went home.

Not very long after this they were married; a quiet wedding as was befitting, for Ralph Lexley had not yet been long in his resting-place. Nevertheless, it was a happy wedding, and happiness, checkered by God's balance of sorrows, followed it. Johnnie had

determined not to live at the House till Mr. Grewby was dead.

"We will not live here till uncle dies," Cécile also had said. "But I must be near him to comfort his old age." Johnnie had eagerly assented.

"Nay, nay, Cécile; a corner is all I want," said the old gentleman. "You must either live alone here, or with your husband. Which is it to be?"

And so it was. Geoffrey and Louise lived at the Grange, and the mill was surrendered to the former in its entirety. Johnnie and Cécile took up their abode at the House. One became rich and prosperous as a manufacturer; the other, already rich, minded the two estates, and between whiles taught his wife to be as fond of rooting into ancient graveyards and musty parchments as himself—until the baby came, a fat, chubby, crowing fellow; and then she would have none of them, and thought it all intolerably dull, and wondered how her husband could possibly care to spend his spare time, or even the time he could not spare, out of the nursery.

THE END.

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